



Encounters with Samulnori: The Cultural Politics of South Korea's Dynamic Percussion Genre

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ENCOUNTERS WITH SAMULNORI:
THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF
SOUTH KOREA'S DYNAMIC PERCUSSION GENRE

ABSTRACT

This dissertation interrogates how diverse actors ascribe semantic, affective, and political meanings to instrumental music under changing historical circumstances and in different performance contexts. In what I call an “ethnographic reception study,” I employ historical and ethnographic methods to assess the ways in which the popular *samulnori* percussion genre from South Korea has been imbued with associations as divergent as a sonic symbol of Korea to narratives of resistance against the state. Through five chapters, I track some of the contested and multiple meanings as they interact, both in historical moments in South Korea and vis-à-vis transnational circulations that led to the genre’s transmission outside Korea. As a genre of percussion music that was first created in South Korea in 1978, *samulnori* has had a complex reception during three dramatic decades in modern Korean history—leading to life-changing encounters from its fans while also eliciting scorn from its detractors.

As a dynamic musical genre that is now notated and largely nonverbal, *samulnori* has served as a user-friendly sonic canvas upon which identities and affinities have been easily grafted by non-Korean fans, leading to the development of amateur *samulnori* ensembles and musical communities around the world. By considering the ways in which the *samulnori* genre has been evaluated, interpreted, and

practiced by different actors, I show how the genre's complex reception exhibits a relational and imbricated set of meanings over time. Last, by considering the cultural politics of *samulnori* from diachronic and synchronic perspectives, I offer a working methodology for contemporary studies of music reception.

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PREFACE

Although I had been to South Korea for three brief visits during my youth, my first extensive stay in the country was in the fall of 2001. After completing my Master's degree in Ethnomusicology at the University of Washington, I received a fellowship from the Blakemore Foundation to pursue intensive language study at Yonsei University's Korean Language Institute. I was eager for the opportunity to live overseas and to explore a culture that seemed both curiously familiar and foreign to me. I had the inauspicious fortune, however, of choosing to begin my journey on the morning of September 11, 2001, the day of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and on Flight 93 that crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

My flight, which was supposed to depart from Detroit at 8:54 that morning (ten minutes after the first hijacked plane was flown into the North Tower of the World Trade Center), was grounded by the FAA and all passengers were forced to deplane. On large-screen monitors at the airport I witnessed the unfolding of events that fateful morning, observing the collapse of the two towers and the Pentagon attack. After leaving Metro Airport and returning home, I spent the next several days glued to the television set in disbelief, unable to focus on anything but the coverage of the 9/11 attacks. I also underwent a period of uncertainty, questioning whether an overseas language program was a trivial pursuit when the world seemed to be falling to pieces in front of my eyes. Unable to reach the airlines to rebook my reservation, I wallowed in doubt for several days, couch-bound.

What eventually brought me out of this state was my belief in the relevance of ethnomusicology. I came to understand that at the heart of my own encounters in ethnomusicology were lessons in cross-cultural exchange and understanding. With a renewed sense of purpose, I eventually traveled to Korea ten days after my originally scheduled departure date. I became aware that I was granted an

extraordinary pass, and I wanted to take full advantage of it. Not having to worry about employment or rent, I immersed myself fully in Korea—the language, culture, music, and complex histories. I learned about Korea in a way that I could not glean from books and I also learned about the Korea and the families that my parents had left behind as graduate students, eager to embark on their own journeys in America.

I went for one year and stayed for four. After graduating from the language institute in 2003, I began to work as the overseas coordinator for SamulNori Hanullim/Nanjang Cultures. It was during this year that I first became acquainted with the musicians and personalities who figure so prominently in my dissertation research. It was also the year when I began to hear, on a regular basis, the genre of *samulnori*—as performed by its master percussionists. I met many members of the early SamulNori community who had been instrumental in shaping the trajectory of the ensemble and the reception of the genre within and beyond Korea.

In thinking back to September 2001, my own narrative could have turned out much differently had I been deterred by the ominous false start to my trip to Korea. In the end, it was my confidence in ethnomusicology as a window into culture that guided my transcontinental journey and the meandering path I chose to pursue for some years in Korea. The time spent living abroad has shaped my doctoral research in innumerable ways. It has afforded me ample time to listen to people's stories and about the music that inspires them.

This dissertation explores the significance of some of those musical encounters.

NOTES ON TRANSLATION AND ROMANIZATION

In this dissertation I have rendered Korean words according to the McCune-Reischauer system of romanization. Two terms that figure prominently in this work—*samulnori* and SamulNori—are written in the way that the SamulNori Hanullim organization has chosen to represent the musical genre “*samulnori*” [*samullori* (사물놀이) in McCune-Reischauer] and the name of the quartet “SamulNori” in English. Since copyright issues and cases of mistaken identity have plagued the SamulNori percussion quartet from its inception, I have made a conscious decision to respect these English spellings (over *samullori* or *samul nori*), in addition to adopting the quartet’s English rendering of names such as those of SamulNori Hanullim’s artistic director, Kim Duk Soo [Kim Töksu/김덕수], and managing director, Joo Jay-youn [Chu Chaeyŏn/주재연]. In these cases, I provide the McCune-Reischauer spelling in brackets at their first appearance in the text. Other more standard exceptions to the McCune-Reischauer system include a decision to retain the more familiar romanization of historical figures and place names, such as Park Chung Hee [Pak Chŏnghŭi/박정희] and Seoul [Sŏul/서울], as well as the names of Korean authors who publish predominantly in English. Korean names are written with the family name preceding the given name.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations (Korean to English; Japanese to English; Spanish to English) are my own.

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Since the themes of “encounters” and “communities” figure prominently in my dissertation, it seems only apropos to recount some of my own encounters with the many friends, mentors, and advocates who have nurtured this dissertation project over many years. I first express from a deep reservoir of gratitude, my auspicious fortune to work with and learn from my advisor Kay Kaufman Shelemay during the past seven years. It is rare to be in the company of an internationally esteemed scholar who is at the same time, utterly devoted to her students’ intellectual development and overall well-being. I say with certainty that this dissertation would not have materialized without the expert advice, feedback, and cheerleading provided by Kay—doled out strategically and knowingly at key moments throughout this past (eventful) year. I am also indebted to Richard K. Wolf for his careful reading of drafts of an article and of my dissertation. His precision with words is guided by both a writer’s poetic sensibility and a scholar’s erudition, and I am grateful for his comments and advice on the craft of writing. I thank Ingrid Monson for her comments and feedback on my work, as well as her enthusiasm for my research. I am inspired by her facility with theoretical texts and her ability to sharply assess their relevance alongside ethnographic modes of analysis; I hope that my own research has benefitted from her example.

The SamulNori Hanullim community in Korea—an extended family of personalities who have proven to be brilliantly talented, endearing, challenging, and avuncular—are the next to thank. As Suzanna Samstag once explained to me, “once you become a member of the SamulNori family, you gain membership for life.” I have often felt this to be true, especially in the moments when I have been sheltered and fed, and been the recipient of more than I could ever reciprocate. I am indebted to Kim Duk Soo Sönsaengnim for allowing me to tag along, hang out, and to be included in events that ranged

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It is only through the generous financial and administrative support from various institutions that I have been able to see this long-term project to fruition. The Blakemore Foundation made it possible for me to focus exclusively on language study for eighteen months, early on in my academic journey. Funding for both archival and ethnographic research has come from the following sources: the Harvard Music Department, the Korea Institute at Harvard, the Steve S. Kang Young Artists and Scholars Fund, the Institute of International Education (Fulbright), the Social Science Research Council, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. I have been fortunate to work with and befriend a number of

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To my parents, and *halmõni*

INTRODUCTION

SOUTH KOREA'S SONIC BOOM

This dissertation interrogates how diverse actors ascribe semantic, affective, and political meanings to instrumental music under changing historical circumstances and in different performance contexts. The popular percussion genre known as *samulnori*—now performed by amateur and professional ensembles all around the world—has accrued many contested meanings since its debut in South Korea in 1978. At one end of the spectrum, the *samulnori* genre can be deemed Korea's first global cultural export, and it has been lauded in the national media as the most representative genre of “traditional” Korean music. At the other end, both the newly stylized and recontextualized percussion genre and its creators have been the target of intense criticism over the years. Members of the original SamulNori quartet (and successive generations of *samulnori* specialists) were denigrated as musical technicians and entrepreneurs who had kowtowed to Western audiences.¹ Often cited in this critique was SamulNori's flashy mode of performance and theatrics, diverging a long way from its humble musical lineages within Korea's folk tradition of performing arts. As a result, the newly conceived genre of *samulnori* that flourished in the 1980s has been excoriated as a “bastardized” style passing for tradition,” according to practitioners (and some scholars) of *p'ungmul*—a composite genre of rural band

¹ I render the name of the percussion quartet (사물놀이) as SamulNori, and the percussion genre that the quartet inspired as *samulnori*. Alternate spellings of the musical genre that appear in academic writings in English include *samullori* (Howard *Creating Korean Music*) and *samul nori* (Hesselink “*Samul nori* as Traditional” and *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*). For a discussion of this, see the Notes on Translation and Romanization.

percussion music and dance that was part of the social fabric of life when Korea was a pre-industrialized, agrarian society, and the musical form from which *samulnori* derived.²

To complicate matters further, running alongside the burgeoning popularization of *samulnori* in the 1980s was a strategic revival of *p'ungmul*. Student activists selectively appropriated and politicized aspects of the older musical genre as a way to align with symbols and narratives of resistance during South Korea's democratization movement. Many of these newcomers to *p'ungmul* defined their own performances of Korea's "most authentic folk musical tradition" against the sleeker and more virtuosic brand of music that the SamulNori quartet was successfully popularizing on international stages and within Korea. Yet the rather sudden surge in the performance of percussion music in the sonic landscape of late twentieth-century South Korea seemed to evoke confused reactions from the general public, with the sounds and perceptions of *samulnori* and *p'ungmul* collapsing into one and the same percussive genre.

In what I call an "ethnographic reception study," I employ historical and ethnographic methods to assess the ways in which the popular *samulnori* percussion genre from South Korea has been imbued with diametrically opposed associations: as a sonic symbol of Korea and yet also in narratives of resistance against the state. This project began as a result of my long-term fascination with the contentious cultural politics that have surrounded *samulnori* since its inception more than three decades ago. How is it that a rhythm-driven instrumental music genre without text, featuring two types of drums and a large and small gong, has elicited such a range of interpretations and value-laden judgments? And given that there were other musical genres with similarly contested lineages, why was *samulnori* singled

² An Pyöngt'ak, as translated and quoted in Nathan Hesselink's, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 7: "What we now call *samul nori* is only [the glittering of] Snow White's costume jewelry. We have eaten her apple, more venomous than pesticide, more poisonous than the word 'nongak.'"

out in private and public debates over what properly represented “Korean culture” in late twentieth-century Korea?

My research focuses on the complex reception of the *samulnori* genre in both Korean and transnational contexts. Through five central chapters I track these multiple and contested meanings as they interact in historical moments and vis-à-vis transnational circulations that led to the genre’s transmission beyond Korea. As there are already numerous articles, chapters, and a newly minted English-language manuscript on SamulNori, I do not intend to revisit terrain trodden elsewhere.³ Hence this dissertation is not a definitive history of SamulNori since 1978. Several such histories exist, supplemented now with personal accounts and reflections recently authored by members of the SamulNori community themselves.⁴ This dissertation is focused less on SamulNori as a group than on the reception of the group and its most memorable legacy—a namesake musical genre. I seek to illuminate some of the individual encounters with SamulNori/*samulnori* through close ethnographic analysis, while positioning the cultural politics emerging from those narratives within a broader sociohistorical framework. My analyses reveal some of the linkages among people, texts, ideas, and musical practice that have interacted in uncanny ways. By considering how the *samulnori* genre has been evaluated, interpreted, and practiced by different actors, I show how the genre’s complex reception exhibits a relational dynamic over time and across geopolitical borders.

In the larger arch of this project, I argue that *samulnori*—as a dynamic musical genre now notated and largely nonverbal—has served as a user-friendly sonic canvas upon which identities and

³ Nathan Hesselink’s *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming and the Rebirth of Itinerant Performance Culture* was published in March 2012 by the University of Chicago Press. I kindly thank Nathan for making his manuscript available to me prior to the publication date. (From this point onwards, I include an abbreviated title for works cited in the footnotes. Complete citations are provided in the bibliography of the dissertation.)

⁴ See Hōnsōn Kim, *Samulnori-ran muöt in’ga; P’ungmul kut-esō samulnori-kkaji*; Kim Hōnsōn *üi samulnori iyagi*; Kim Yong-bae *üi salm-kwa yesul*.; Howard, *Creating Korean Music*; Hesselink, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*. Also see: Kim Duk Soo, *Gülloböl kwangdae Kim Töksu*.

affinities have been easily inscribed by its fans, practitioners, and critics. While the first half of the dissertation is centered squarely in South Korea, the second half ventures outwards, and considers the transmission of the *samulnori* genre in transnational contexts. By studying global encounters with *samulnori* from historical and ethnographic perspectives, I move toward a more complex reading of a “world music” genre’s reception by international audiences.⁵ Steven Feld’s observation of the “celebratory” and “anxious” narratives that often characterize world music is apt here. He observes that the discourse surrounding world music genres can be categorized into two opposing poles—1) one which produces anxieties over the commodification and manipulation of “local” musics by Western corporations, for instance and 2) one which revels in the hybridization of cultures.⁶ My study aims to occupy a more middle ground through a careful consideration of the narratives voiced by *samulnori*’s creators, patrons, international fans, and practitioners. At different points in my dissertation I also call attention to the importance of attending to sonic domains, particularly sonic fields not featuring conventional “texts,” as a way of understanding social history. The following tale of a storied slogan suggests this approach.

⁵ The term “world music” is a fraught term. I choose to use it in this dissertation mainly to refer to SamulNori’s international touring presence on the “world music circuit” of presenters and managers.

⁶ I quote from Feld directly: “It is this celebratory narrative that sees world music as indigeneity’s champion and best friend. This celebratory narrative sees musical hybridity and fusion as cultural signs of unbounded and deterritorialized identities. . . . Anxious narratives tend to focus more sharply on economics and power. They emphasize how the music marketplace is structurally founded on historical inequities in the areas of copyright, royalty structures, ownership regimes, and access to the market. They insist that the industry is currently organized in ways that typically reproduce and amplify these fundamental inequities.” From: Feld “My Life in the Bush of Ghosts,” 41.

DYNAMIC KOREA

For audiences whose impression of traditional Korean music has been that of staid, rather uninspired forms, the variety and spirit of SamulNori rhythms is sufficient to awaken even the most sluggish of souls.

—Han Myung-hee, 1993⁷

In December 2001 the Kim Dae-jung [Kim Taejung] administration (1998–2003) heavily promoted “Dynamic Korea” as a new national slogan or “national brand.” Images of the logos were splashed all over tourism advertisements and banners, as if it were a trademark. Carefully vetted by private and public sectors prior to the 2002 FIFA World Cup (co-hosted by South Korea and Japan), the Dynamic Korea slogan was selected because it was said to capture best the spirit of Korea—a vibrant nation that has overcome adversity and achieved economic success despite all odds.⁸

The slogan was also a rhetorical challenge to Korea’s long-held moniker “Land of the Morning Calm”—a name associated with Korea since the end of the nineteenth century.⁹ In 1883 Boston-bred Percival Lowell traveled to Korea (then known as Chosŏn) as foreign secretary and counselor to the Korean special mission to the United States. Lowell’s travelogue *Chosŏn, the Land of the Morning Calm: A Sketch of Korea*, bestowed both the nickname and the placid image to accompany it:

...the sun rose for them in the peaceful splendor that wraps the morning hours there even to this day, and the sunbeams fell into the valleys between the hills and nestled on the land. “Morning Calm” they called it; and it seemed not so much a name as its very essence. The drowsy quiet of the spot lulled them to rest, and they

⁷ Han, “Samulnori: Providing a Musical Release,” 34.

⁸ *Dynamic Korea: Origin and Concept* (pamphlet), 2007.

⁹ “Morning Calm” is a translation from the Sino-Korean characters for Chosŏn (朝鮮, literally, “morning”; “fresh” and “clear”). The translation was not used by Koreans, however, and therefore represents an interpretation that was used by Westerners to describe Korea.

fell asleep, passed away. They were in the world, yet it was to them as if it had passed away. And so they slept on for ages.¹⁰

Lowell's portrayal of an idyllic land and a soporific people painted a slightly more positive image of Korea than the isolationist image summoned by William Eliot Griffis's "Hermit Kingdom."¹¹ In the mid-twentieth century, however, "Hermit Kingdom" began to be associated with South Korea's northern counterpart, the reclusive state of North Korea, while "Morning Calm" was related with the south. As it turned out, the images of placidity and hostile isolationism were hard for South Korea to shake off. A brochure published by the Korea Overseas Information Service in 2007 identified the central reasons why twenty-first-century South Korea desperately needed a brand makeover:



Korea can be described with many words, but the most appropriate descriptions called Korea an extraordinarily dynamic country.

- *Korea has risen from the ashes of the Korean War to achieve remarkable economic development over the past high-century.*
- *A modern democracy, founded after overcoming the heartrending pain of foreign occupation and national division, is eagerly working towards reunification.*
- *Korean popular culture, based upon unique national traits, is spreading around the world, taking advantage of the Hallyu (Korean Wave) phenomenon.*
- *Korea is emerging as a technological powerhouse in the 21st century.*

The achievements made in cultural, economic, scientific and political sectors have their roots in the constantly evolving dynamism of Korea and its people, a dynamism which has endured for thousands of years Dynamic Korea represents the vibrant spirit; the heritage of the Korean people that will be passed to future generations. It embodies the unshakable moral strength that has overcome so much hardship, as well as a vision which proactively explores the future.

Figure 0.1. Dynamic Korea pamphlet.

¹⁰ Lowell, *Chosŏn, the Land of the Morning Calm*, 6.

¹¹ Griffis, *Corea, the hermit nation*.

DYNAMIC SAMULNORI

The South Korean percussion genre known as *samulnori* and first performed by the quartet of the same name became in many ways the perfect sonic expression of Dynamic Korea. From its 1978 debut at a small basement theater in Seoul to a musical performance at the United Nations Headquarters in 1995, thereby representing South Korea as a nation, the SamulNori percussion quartet has played for a myriad array of local and international audiences. The original quartet of percussionists, steeped in the milieu of Korea's performing arts since their youth, effectively recontextualized and "staged" the rhythmic cycles derived from *p'ungmul*.¹² Beginning in the 1980s the SamulNori quartet toured extensively as part of the world music circuit in North America, Europe, and Japan. Within the span of a few years their repertory and performance style became so popular that their specific brand of percussion music was adopted by fans-turned-practitioners; eventually the new genre of music known as *samulnori* was born. The group's success overseas helped fuel an awakened interest in and revaluation of traditional Korean performing arts on the domestic front. Today *samulnori* (literally, "four things play") is regularly practiced and performed throughout South Korea, many diasporic Korean communities, and in places where a connection to Korea is limited and sometimes unexpected.

Despite its relatively short history and contested "traditional" pedigree, the music of *samulnori* has often been featured in tourism and marketing campaigns sponsored by the South Korean government. In June 2011 the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) launched an interactive "Touch Korea" program

¹² The genre of *samulnori* is often differentiated from *p'ungmul* by the use of spatial metaphors. In the public and scholarly discourse on *samulnori*, the SamulNori quartet is credited with bringing the sonic and sensory realms of *p'ungmul* from the outdoor *madang* (courtyard of a village home) onto the Western proscenium stage (*mudae*) for Korean and Western audiences alike. Donna Kwon has discussed the multivalent spatial frames of *madang* and *p'an* (village common) in her doctoral dissertation on *p'ungmul*; see Kwon, "Music, Movement and Space." While the *samulnori* genre may also be performed outdoors and share similarities in form to abbreviated *p'ungmul* performances, the genre still maintains a strong linkage to stages and the "staging" of Korean percussion.

on its main website. Designed to attract potential tourists to the country, the program allows users to click on icons to experience the sights and sounds of Korean culture. Virtual visitors can select the image of a small gong to listen to sound bites of the four percussion instruments. Subsequent clicks direct users to a short video of a *samulnori* performance. KTO's rhetoric used to describe the percussion genre drips with unabashed enthusiasm and pride.

Enjoy the Excitement of Samullori [Samulnori]!

Samullori is one of the world's most dynamic music[s] created by a kkwaenggwari (small flat gong), a janggu [*changgo*] (traditional hourglass drum), a buk [*puk*] (barrel drum), and a jing [*ching*] (large gong). The nori (traditional play/game) culture can be seen through the cheerful beats and exciting performances of samullori. Let your body move [to] the beat and rhythm of Korea's nori.¹³

The text introduces the video as: "From Korea, overflowing with excitement."¹⁴

¹³ The Korea Tourism Organization adheres to the official "Revised Romanization of Korean" system decreed by the South Korean government in 2000 for English-language materials, hence the rendering *samullori*.

¹⁴ Korea Tourism Organization website, http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/FU/FU_EN_15.jsp?cid=1303717 (accessed April 17, 2012).



Figure 0.2. “Touch Korea” website screenshot. ©Korea Tourism Organization.

In conjunction with the artist management company of Nanjang Cultures, the SamulNori Hanullim organization was quick to jump on the Dynamic Korea brand-wagon.¹⁵ Kim Duk Soo, one of the original SamulNori members and over time the veritable “face” of the ensemble, produced a program entitled “Kim Duk Soo’s Dynamic Korea.” The show ran from June 1 to 20, 2002, at the Hanjeon Artspool Center in Seoul. Its limited run was timed to coincide with the festivities surrounding the opening of the 2002 World Cup (May 31–June 30). As artistic director, Kim choreographed a program that featured an expanded roster of traditional Korean musicians and dancers in addition to his troupe of *samulnori* percussionists. This was less a singular spotlight on the *samulnori* genre than a variety show

¹⁵ In 2001, the SamulNori Hanullim organization expanded to incorporate an artist management company called Nanjang Cultures, Inc. Although the staffing did not increase greatly, the number of *kugak* (traditional Korean music) artists that became affiliated with SamulNori Hanullim grew. In 2003, Nanjang Cultures represented the five *p’ansori* (epic storytelling through song) vocal artists and their accompanists at the Lincoln Center Summer Festival and Edinburgh International Festival.

“harmonizing song, dance and music” and designed to appeal to foreign visitors to Korea.¹⁶ Kim’s remarks in the program brochure reflect the heightened tenor of nationalistic rhetoric that pervaded public discourse in 2002:

DYNAMIC KOREA has been prepared for visitors from all over the world to celebrate the long anticipated 2002 FIFA World Cup Korea-Japan festival. I have tried to integrate the spirit and energy of Korean cultural art into this performance. . . I am convinced that DYNAMIC KOREA is the most representative cultural commodity of Korea and can be enjoyed and appreciated by an international audience.¹⁷

Of its many sponsors, “Kim Duk Soo’s Dynamic Korea” received support and funding directly from various divisions within the South Korean government (e.g., Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, Korean Government Information Agency, Ministry of Government Administration and Public Affairs, and the Korea National Tourism Organization).¹⁸

In fact, the dynamic sounds of Korean percussion received much media coverage that year, as Kim Duk Soo and members of the SamulNori Hanullim organization appeared prominently in the stands of Korean matches during the World Cup games. Much like the vuvuzelas that were a sonic (albeit annoying) fixture of the 2010 FIFA World Cup hosted by South Africa, the drums and gongs of *samulnori* added to the sonic intensity of the 2002 matches, buoying the spirited cheers for the Korean team. SamulNori Hanullim produced a VHS instructional video of various chants and rhythms, many of which became the rallying cheers for the “Red Devil” fans and their Korean soccer team.¹⁹ Even the 2002 FIFA World Cup Anthem, written by Vangelis, featured music from Kim Duk Soo’s SamulNori

¹⁶ “Kim Duk Soo’s Dynamic Korea,” program notes.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The organization has since shortened its name to the Korea Tourism Organization.

¹⁹ SamulNori Hanullim, “Samul Ŭngwŏn,” [Samulnori cheers]. VHS.

Hanullim troupe and Japan's counterpart, the legendary KODO taiko drummers. In 2002 South Korea's slogan Dynamic Korea truly morphed into its own audible incarnation.



Figure 0.3. Kim Duk Soo, FIFA World Cup, 2002. ©SamulNori Hanullim.

On January 22, 2009, the current Lee Myung-bak [Yi Myōngbak] administration, in power since 2008, announced the inauguration of a Presidential Council on Nation Branding.²⁰ Lee proclaimed in a 2008 speech on South Korea's independence day: "If the nation wants to be labeled as an advanced country, it will be necessary to improve its image and reputation significantly."²¹ Euh Yoon-dae [Ŏ Yundae], the first chairman of the presidential council, advocated for the nomination of a new "national brand." Of the many slogans coined and marketed during the 2000s, Euh claimed, nothing seemed to capture effectively the "Miracle on the Han River" and Korea's burgeoning information technology market. He also noted the range of semantic meanings that were embedded in previous slogans and mottos—meanings that sometimes worked against the positive image that the Korean government was

²⁰ KoreaBrand.net website: http://www.koreabrand.net/en/util/util_about_pcnb.do (accessed January 13, 2012).

²¹ Lee Myung-bak's speech is quoted at: <http://www.koreabrand.net/gokr/en/cms/selectKbrdCmsPageTbl.do?cd=0118&m1=1&m2=3> (accessed January 13, 2012).

trying to cultivate. “Korea Sparkling” (first launched in 2007) seemed to lack import and was too effervescent.²² And while the Dynamic Korea campaign had aligned well with the vibrant and visionary agenda that the South Korean government stood for in 2002, the word “dynamic” now evoked both positive and negative connotations. According to Euh, “dynamic” could also be read as “explosive,” conjuring up either the violent protests during South Korea’s democratization movement or the tense situation between North and South Korea. During his tenure Euh suggested “Miraculous Korea” as a suitable alternative. This was passed over, however, for the slogan “Korea, A Loving Embrace.”²³

While the medley of slogans speaks to the constant search and negotiation for South Korea’s quintessential branding image, I contend that there is more to learn from the promotion and demise of the Dynamic Korea slogan. I suggest that there is a sonic component to this story—one that can be heard in South Korea’s sonic boom of the 1980s. Euh cited violent demonstrations as a reason why the term “dynamic” semantically carried explosive potential. Given how swiftly the sounds of *samulnori* were mapped onto the Dynamic Korea catchphrase, one wonders whether the performance of *p’ungmul* by student activists could just as easily trigger an auditory synesthesia of the term “dynamic” with the sounds of protest and violence. I believe there is convincing evidence to suggest that this is the case, especially in light of the fact that the general public has grappled with distinguishing the musical differences between *samulnori* and *p’ungmul*. My narration of the Dynamic Korea story here illustrates the point that sonic registers can animate, complicate, and force reappraisals of historical events and, in this case, agendas of the state.

²² See <http://londonkoreanlinks.net/2007/07/09/korea-sparkling-explained/> (accessed January 13, 2012).

²³ As of early 2012 the Korea Tourism Organization is using the motto “Korea, Be Inspired.”

PERCUSSIVE NOTES AND MEANING: CHALLENGES IN INTERPRETATION

To say that the sounds of Korean percussion began to give off mixed signals in late twentieth-century Korea is an understatement. During the 1980s the ubiquity of *p'ungmul* at scenes of protest led to the sonic linkage of drumming with dissent and the democratization movement.²⁴ But ironically, in the midst of this dissonant tapestry of sounds that sounded off resistance against the state, the genre of *samulnori* was featured prominently in several international events and large-scale cultural productions sponsored by the South Korean government. In late August 1988, just before the commencement of the Seoul Summer Olympic Games, the SamulNori quartet traveled to Athens, Greece, to accompany the procession and official lighting of the Olympic torch. The Taejŏn Expo of 1993 also featured an elaborate performance by a thousand-member *samulnori* team, trained by members of the newly expanded SamulNori Hanullim organization. As one of South Korea's first *cultural* exports in a post-agrarian age, SamulNori's global itinerants were embraced by the state for their local roots that were spreading via cosmopolitan routes—a sonic emblem of a dynamic “tradition” emerging from a newly industrialized and economically viable South Korea.

It is not surprising, then, that the sounds of *p'ungmul* and *samulnori*—two genres that share the same instrumentation and the same rhythmic DNA—have come to be conflated in the ears and minds of many Koreans. In her study of the cultural politics of Trinidad's carnival musics, Jocelyne Guilbault identifies the “audible entanglements” that attend the “multiple musical practices and soundings assembled in a music such as calypso and the affective resonances these create for individuals and communities.”²⁵ “Audible entanglements” are not just present in musical realms but speak to broader

²⁴ See Lee, “Drumming of Dissent.”

domains by assembling “social relations, cultural expressions, and political formations.”²⁶ I find Guilbault’s analysis extremely useful in my own research on the cultural politics of *samulnori*’s reception. And while the musical genres of *samulnori* and calypso are two different creatures, there is a shared interest in framing the research inquiry through an assessment of “the conditions that enabled this musical practice to be valorized, contested, and targeted as a field of cultural politics.”²⁷ Unlike calypso, which features a singer accompanied by an ensemble of instruments, *samulnori* is a strictly instrumental music genre. One perplexing question thus remains: how does one attend to the analysis of contested meanings in an instrumental music genre?

For the study of song, or music that is linked to a text, the interpretation of text-music relations as generative of meaning plays a crucial role in music analysis. Popular music studies, in particular, thrive on this kind of textual analysis. Without text, lyrics, or a narrative program attached to music, however, the approaches to the study of instrumental music tend to fall under two umbrella categories: (1) attending to the “music itself” to explain significance by way of structure, form, and style; or (2) analyzing historical or social context to elucidate music’s meaning. From these basic analytical orientations, which do not preclude a researcher’s combination of the two, the hermeneutic possibilities then expand and diversify. Ingrid Monson’s study of the rhythm section in jazz ensembles, for example, is an excellent synthesis of both musical (i.e., by way of transcriptions) and social analysis.²⁸ Depending on the type of nontexted music to be studied, its documentation, and how it is performed, analytical

²⁵ Guilbault, *Governing Sound*, 284.

²⁶ Guilbault, “Audible Entanglements,” 40–41.

²⁷ Guilbault, *Governing Sound*, 3.

²⁸ Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*.

approaches can vary widely and at the same time bring into relief disciplinary methodologies, assumptions, and limitations.

All instrumental compositions that are considered part of the *samulnori* canon have been rendered in musical notation. The notation is published in SamulNori Hanullim's workbooks and has also been adapted for use by *samulnori* practitioners. For a strictly music-focused study, these transcriptions of *samulnori* would serve as a primary text for rhythmic or formal analysis. Earlier in this section I foregrounded the interpretive challenges created by the "audible entanglements" of two related but distinct percussion genres. Here, a notation- or transcription-based comparative analysis between *p'unmul* and *samulnori* rhythmic cycles would be one approach to interpretation. Nathan Hesselink has in fact demonstrated this kind of analytical inquiry—honing in on the "Honam udo kut" that is realized by both *p'unmul* and *samulnori* genres.²⁹ Hesselink's conclusion is that there is structural coherence in the sequencing and configuration of set rhythmic cycles shared between *samulnori*'s adaptation and the older *p'unmul* version. Thus this type of formal analysis proves useful in clarifying the subtle differences and similarities in the musical properties shared between two related rhythm-based music genres.

TOWARD AN ETHNOGRAPHIC RECEPTION STUDY

In my dissertation I take an interdisciplinary methodological approach to the study of *samulnori*'s cultural politics, through historical and ethnographic lines of inquiry.³⁰ At the heart of this interpretive endeavor is an attempt to listen closely to what is said about *samulnori*'s many meanings—in the voices of its fans, critics, practitioners, and creators. On a fundamental level, my project is a reception

²⁹ Hesselink, "Samul nori as Traditional."

³⁰ I define "cultural politics" as the sphere in which cultural meanings are constructed, contested, and negotiated by actors, and where relational dynamics of power are exhibited.

study of a musical genre. Building out from there, I consider the contested meanings surrounding *samulnori*—zooming into “moments” and events of significance at different temporal points during the past three decades.

Although *samulnori* is a genre of nontexted music, much has been written about it. I evaluate these sources along with my own ethnographic interviews with various actors to ascertain complicated and contradictory meanings that appear at important junctures. Beyond these standard “texts,” however, I also incorporate critical analyses of musical practice (by way of ethnographic observation and close video analysis). As I have noted, the reception of *samulnori* is not confined to the auditory experience of its listening audience. Rather, the story of *samulnori*’s reception includes the phenomenon of listeners who have become active practitioners of the genre. As a result, there is often more at stake in the cultural politics surrounding the genre, with a certain level of experiential knowledge of and ownership over *samulnori*.

The theoretical orientation for my dissertation reveals influence from poststructuralist thought (e.g., lack of stable meanings in a text) and reception theory. The latter has proven particularly instructive in understanding the relationship between various circulating “texts” and their readers. As developed by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, this theoretical approach shifts the focus from an analysis of the author and the text to a consideration of the reader’s interpretations of the text. Iser pushed the analytical framework further by questioning how and under what conditions a text has meaning for a reader.³¹ He combined an investigation of the production of meaning that occurs through the process of reading with a sensitivity to historical context. I ask similar questions but with an expansive and flexible interpretation of what constitutes a text and a reader.

³¹ Iser, *Act of Reading*, 18-19.

When thinking of instrumental music and its scores as texts, it is useful to spend some time interrogating the notion of the “musical work” itself. Philosopher Lydia Goehr asserted that the concept of the musical work is not an ancient one in Western culture but one that first came into existence in 1800.³² In *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, Goehr’s central claim is that “given certain changes in the late eighteenth century, persons who thought, spoke about, or produced music were able for the first time to comprehend and treat the activity of producing music as one primarily involving the composition and performance of works.”³³ This conceptual shift led to a change in practice—the composition, performance, and reception of great symphonic and instrumental works during the nineteenth century. While Goehr’s historicization of the “work-concept” has been disputed by musicologists, I find two aspects of her essay extremely useful: (1) the forced reappraisal of the ontology and valuation of the “musical work,” and related to that, (2) the move away from understanding and analyzing music history as a chronology of works and toward a more integrated musico-cultural history.

Goehr’s essay deals predominantly with nineteenth-century European instrumental music. What happens when Goehr’s philosophical treatise about musical works is extended beyond the Western classical music canon, however? Are there broader observations that trigger points of reflection even in different cultural contexts? And how might this excursion productively frame a hermeneutical inquiry into a South Korean instrumental music genre that has derived from a so-called functional music tradition to emerge over time as a canon of fixed pieces, now performed by amateur ensembles around the world?

³² Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*, 113.

³³ Ibid.

In the case of *samulnori*, musical texts (*samulnori* notation) exist alongside audio recordings, videos, articles, and books about the genre and contemporary musical practices that can be documented by an ethnographer such as myself. I propose a study of musical reception with an expanded repertoire of interpretive “texts”: notational, aural, and social. In a similar spirit, Susan Bennett’s study of theater audiences has reassigned reception theory’s main protagonists beyond the conventional text and its reader to the realm of performance and spectatorship.³⁴ In my study of *samulnori*, however, the relational dynamics exhibit further complexities, with amateur spectatorship morphing into performance, and with an ongoing interaction between *samulnori*’s creators and its various local and international audiences. For this reason, ethnographic work with the SamulNori community has been central to my study of *samulnori* reception during the past three decades.

GROUNDWORK

The ethnographic foundations and language acquisition for this project began long before I left for my fieldwork year in 2008. As mentioned in the preface, I traveled to South Korea after receiving my Master’s degree in Ethnomusicology from the University of Washington in 2001. Although I was born in Inch’ön, South Korea, I had never spent a significant amount of time in the country until my twenties. As a second-generation Korean American raised in a suburb of metropolitan Detroit, my exposure to Korean culture was largely circumscribed to my family and the Korean community at the church my parents attended. I grew up with a proficient listening comprehension of the Korean language but did not speak Korean with my parents. I realized that to pursue ethnomusicology seriously with a focus on Korean music, I would first have to dedicate myself to language study. I was fortunate to receive a

³⁴ See Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*.

Blakemore Foundation fellowship that allowed me to study full-time at Yonsei University's Korean Language Institute in Seoul. There I spent eighteen months studying Korean four hours a day, five days a week to graduate. During this time I also began to take lessons in *changgo*, *kayagŭm* and *p'ansori* and started my own explorations in Korean music. Although most of my study was self-directed, I had the benefit of knowing several *sŏnbae* (elders or mentors) who guided me to teachers right for me. I also traveled extensively throughout South Korea on weekends and holidays. During the summer of 2002 I filmed over fifty hours of video at regional festivals and performances. This time of discovery was critical for my understanding of Korean music and led me to a network of musicians, instructors, and scholars invested in the future of this music.

I first became acquainted with the SamulNori Hanullim organization in 2003. After sending an e-mail to Managing Director Joo Jay-youn, inquiring whether they might need a freelance translator, I was promptly interviewed and hired as the overseas coordinator for SamulNori Hanullim. This somewhat unexpected turn of events led me to extend my stay in Korea to act as a liaison between SamulNori Hanullim and foreign presenters, in addition to serving as a tour manager for SamulNori's 2003 tour of Denmark. Although I had no prior experience with arts administration, my single biggest asset was that of being a native English speaker based in Korea. That, coupled with training in ethnomusicology and an interest in Korean music, made me an ideal candidate for a position that SamulNori Hanullim has otherwise struggled to keep consistently filled. While native English speakers run aplenty in South Korea, the long hours, modest pay, and stressful work environment have not elicited long-term commitments from foreigners or native Koreans.

I was plunged headfirst into the fast and frenetic world of Korean performing arts. At that time SamulNori Hanullim was in a period of expansion and had just launched Nanjang Cultures Inc.—an artist management company for traditional Korean musicians. When I started, Nanjang Cultures was

busily preparing for performances of the complete cycle of extant *p'ansori* epics at the Lincoln Center Festival in New York and the Edinburgh International Festival in 2003. I was responsible for editing the English program notes and for securing P-1 entertainer visas for the *p'ansori* artists before their travel to the United States. For a first job assignment, it was exciting to take part in the logistics behind a major event, and to meet some of the legendary *p'ansori* performers I had previously only read about in books and articles.

The Taehangno office—which also had a rehearsal studio in the back—was abuzz with *samulnori* musicians, dancers, and visitors on a regular basis. In terms of soundscapes it was almost always a lively office, with the sounds of *samulnori* and the recorded soundtracks for the dancers' rehearsals intermingling with office chatter and the stentorian voice of Kim Duk Soo. At this office I met many people who would continue to be part of my life even after I stopped working full-time for SamulNori Hanullim. Although my official term with the organization was characterized by both excitement and hardship, I consider this experience one of the most important in my adult life. There was a steep learning curve in terms of the business language acquisition while also gaining job know-how in artist management and cultural proficiency in Korean office hierarchies. And I was exposed first-hand to the intricate and connected world of *kugak* (traditional Korean music) and how a traditional Korean music organization aspires to be relevant in modern South Korea.

METHODOLOGIES

In many ways my prior work with *samulnori* musicians and staff members cultivated a strong personal network that was critical during my fieldwork year (August 2008—October 2009), which was supported by a Fulbright IIE Research Fellowship. When I returned to South Korea in August 2008 to begin my fieldwork year, one of the unexpected challenges was to determine how to assert a scholarly

persona among people who had previously known me as a staff member. I was expected to resume certain tasks and roles I had taken on during my tenure as overseas coordinator for SamulNori. While this took some negotiating at the beginning of my fieldwork year, I managed to establish my role as a researcher yet also go with the flow when necessary. The dual identity had benefits: I found that when assisting with events in my former capacity, I was afforded numerous privileges that came with being a member of the staff. Not only did I have unrestricted access to film many important performances and festivals, but I also benefited from already existing relationships.

Former co-workers made sure I had access to research materials and facilitated introductions to many of the early members of the SamulNori community. As a result I was able to interview the founding members of the SamulNori quartet as well as key administrative staff who had been involved in the group's creation and development. In-depth interviews with the first managing director, American-born Suzanna Samstag, and the current managing director, Joo Jay-youn contributed valuable insights into how SamulNori's own English press materials were penned and placed into global circulation.³⁵ During my fieldwork year I participated in two important events: the World SamulNori Festival and Competition in Puyŏ (October 2008), where I served as coordinator for more than a hundred foreign participants from eight countries, and the International SamulNori Symposium held at the National Museum of Korea (January 2009), where I moderated the panel "Encounters with SamulNori." My experiences as a participant-observer in these two events provided an understanding of how the SamulNori group is continuing to promote and identify itself and produce self-reflective discourse on its thirty-year history.

My ethnographic research thus consists of years of formal and informal participant-observation, more than fifty in-depth interviews, documentary research in SamulNori Hanullim's office, and over

³⁵ As with the names SamulNori and *samulnori*, I retain the romanization preferences of my informants for their names.

eighty hours of field video. I was based in Seoul but traveled extensively throughout Korea during my fieldwork year, relying on its efficient transportation system to plan excursions to different regions at a moment's notice. One research trip took me to Japan in July 2009, where I observed Kim Duk Soo's rehearsals at the Tokyo Enokizaka studio and performance at the Noh Theater in Yokohama.

While it was important to be able to observe performances and festivals in person, I also spent a great deal of time conducting archival and library research in Seoul. My host affiliation during the Fulbright year was at the Seoul National University Archives, where I spent a month conducting research, focusing primarily on the role of drumming in protest during Korea's democratization movement in the 1980s. I also made use of the archives at the Korea Democracy Foundation and the Arko Arts Library in Seoul. On a more informal level I visited the SamulNori Hanullim office the Gwanghwamun [Kwanghwamun] Arts Hall on a regular basis to view and receive copies of important SamulNori documents and materials pertaining to my research. Personalized histories and feedback interviews have greatly nuanced and enhanced the archival research I have pursued at various libraries and archives since 2006.³⁶

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter 1 sets the stage by describing the early reception history of the SamulNori quartet, which eventually led to the development of the *samulnori* repertory. I explore the creative and experimental environment that fostered the "SamulNori project" at the Space Theater in the late 1970s. Unlike other SamulNori histories, which focus largely on a singular quartet that emerged overnight in 1978 to

³⁶ Archival research was conducted at the Jean Gray Hargrove Music Library at the University of California at Berkeley, the Yenching Library at Harvard University, the Charles E. Young Research Library at UCLA, the Korea Democracy Foundation Archives, and the Seoul National University Archives.

become one of South Korea's most famous musical groups, I give attention to the factors instrumental in SamulNori's early success—namely, the quartet's patrons and fans. I focus on the innovative and artistic milieu cultivated by the cultural activist Kim Swoo Geun, and the reception of the quartet's performances at the Space Theater (Konggan Sarang) in Seoul as a way of shedding light on the construction of SamulNori as one of South Korea's cultural beacons during the 1980s. In this chapter I draw on archival materials in addition to interviews conducted with members of the early SamulNori community.

The second chapter, "The Drumming of Dissent during South Korea's Democratization Movement," examines the politicization of *p'ungmul* in the 1980s. As the genre from which *samulnori* derives, *p'ungmul* experienced a revival and reappraisal during the same decade when the SamulNori quartet began to tour internationally. Although *p'ungmul* and *samulnori* have often been treated as mutually exclusive genres in Korean music scholarship, I have observed much overlap between the two, especially during the late twentieth century. This chapter explores how *p'ungmul* became a symbol of resistance in South Korea's democratization movement, as it was the representative musical tradition of Korea's peasant class and connected with a *minjung* (protest)-centered historiography. Student activists who first took up *p'ungmul* as a mode of protest were often the first to charge *samulnori* as inauthentic, despite blurring the lines at times in the learning, acquisition, and performance of *p'ungmul* (which often reflected an influence from *samulnori*).

The third chapter, "Inscribing Difference," is an exploration of identity politics as manifested in a transnational context. Stemming from my involvement with the MIT-based Oori Korean drumming group in the latter 2000s, I address the circulations of various media (e.g., notation books, recordings, musical practice, and ideas) and investigate the cultural politics that emerge with the engagement of an imported musical practice from Korea. I provide a close reading of two brief texts from the SamulNori

Hanullim press packet and the Oori group, and examine the implications of redactions and additions with Oori text, as they illuminate idealized visions of ancient and “traditional” forms of Korean drumming that are linked to communal lifestyles. This textual analysis allows dialogue with my observations of musical practice, which I argue is largely facilitated by SamulNori’s pedagogical materials placed into circulation in the 1990s. The second half of the chapter uncovers the complex and sometimes incongruous set of subjectivities that come into play when various circulations modulate into musical practices and community formation among ethnic Koreans in places like Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Chapter 4 theorizes “encounters” as a processual modality through which cross-cultural exchange occurs and where musical reception shifts from the passive to the active. I give attention to the encounters with SamulNori that emerged in transnational contexts, reviewing ethnographic interviews that describe first encounters with the music that then led to conversion from fandom to active engagement with learning how to play Korean percussion instruments. Brief profiles of *samulnori* groups from four countries (United States, Switzerland, Mexico, and Japan) are based on the analysis of encounter narratives and the individualized sets of meanings that are applied to this percussion genre from Korea.³⁷ The group profiles provide the necessary context for Chapter 5, which examines the World SamulNori Festival of 2008, a large-scale event that culminated in the convergence of all profiled individuals in Korea. Using ethnographic videos and interviews conducted with festival staff and participants, I interrogate the politics of place as it emerged in the festival’s opening event— an “International Pinari” featuring the World SamulNori Team. The 2008 festival and performance marked the thirtieth anniversary of the SamulNori group; I analyze the opening event both for its symbolic

³⁷ With the exception of the Shinparam group in Minnesota, which includes Korean adoptees and Korean Americans, all other *samulnori* groups profiled in this study have non-Korean membership.

currency for the SamulNori Hanullim organization (in affirming the global reach of the *samulnori* genre) and for its remarkable literal and figurative “homecoming” for these international *samulnori* ensembles.

In this reception study of the *samulnori* genre both within and outside Korea, I pay attention to various registers of cultural politics, broadly construed. Chapter 2 clearly narrates a politics of resistance, while chapter 3 delves into politics of ethnic identity within a transnational diasporic context. Chapter 5 and parts of chapter 1 discuss how the genre of *samulnori* has been represented as a nationalistic symbol of Korean culture. And Chapter 5 investigates the politics of place within the context of an international festival. These assessments reveal how various cultural politics can be mapped onto a percussion music genre and how they can be transformed and overlap in unusual ways over time.

CHAPTER ONE

SPACE AND THE BIG BANG

SamulNori became SamulNori Hanullim, Inc. (Hanullim means big bang) in 1993. This growth from a four-man performance ensemble into a company of thirty artists meant that SamulNori's new genre in traditional Korean arts, music, and dance over the last two decades had now also become a viable educational and research enterprise.

—SamulNori Hanullim, n.d.¹

In actuality, Konggan did not embark only to explain Korea to the Koreans; it was its ceaseless wish, too, to explain Korea to other countries.

—Alain Delissen, 2001.²

In 1993 the SamulNori quartet officially disbanded, ending their phenomenal run. As many histories of the group narrate, the quartet began as a modest experiment in 1978 and developed organically into a musical force with lasting implications. Within the span of fifteen years the percussion ensemble claimed over 3,500 performances and was credited with catapulting their brand of music into South Korea's sonic landscape as the country's representative genre of *kugak* (Korean traditional music). Their success on international stages spurred a reappraisal of the status of traditional Korean arts on the domestic front. The music that the quartet performed—an adaptation of *p'unghmul* (*rural band percussion music and dance*)—was also embraced and imitated by many Korean amateur fans. And in many ways, SamulNori's popularity outside Korea could be viewed as a precursor to the Korean Wave that swept

¹ This description comes from an undated promotional pamphlet: *SamulNori Hanullim* (Artistic Director Kim Duk Soo), with Lee Sun Chul [Yi Sönoch'öl] listed as the Managing Director. It is likely that the pamphlet was printed for distribution in 1994.

² Delissen, "Aesthetic Pasts of Space," 254.

through parts of Asia in the 2000s.³

But as with many musical groups that have a steep and sudden rise, good things often come to an end. Typically glossed over in SamulNori narratives or confined to the domains of conversation and hearsay, such difficulties as internal strife, conflicting agendas, and burn-out all factored into the dissolution of the “original” SamulNori quartet.⁴ This did not lead to the demise of *samulnori* as a genre, however. In fact, it was during the 1990s that the genre of *samulnori* flourished among a growing base of fans-turned-practitioners, due in large part to pedagogical outreach efforts sponsored by the quartet and arguably its most tireless and ambitious advocate, Kim Duk Soo.

Master of the hourglass *changgo* drum, Kim Duk Soo took up the reins and launched a reconfigured and expanded enterprise in 1993, calling it SamulNori Hanullim: 사물놀이 한울림 (literally, “grand reverberation”; often translated as SamulNori “big bang”). Kim presided as the artistic director for an organization that featured a roster of *samulnori* teams, an educational division, and a managing staff. The transformation from a stand-alone quartet to an artistic roster capable of deploying separate teams to different events reflects the popularization of the percussion genre by the early 1990s. Not only was there an increased demand for *samulnori* performances, but there was also a younger generation of musicians who had essentially become adept (and even fanatic) at playing *samulnori*. The

³ The Korean Wave, or Hallyu, refers to the popularization and spread of Korean dramas, films, and popular music that hit parts of Asia in the 2000s.

⁴ The notion of an “original” SamulNori quartet can easily be called into question due to the fact that membership was never truly fixed—even from the first performances at the Konggan Sarang (Space Theater). One of the founding members, Kim Yong-bae [Kim Yongbae], left the group in 1984 when he was recruited by the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts (국립국악원; now known as the National Gugak Center) to establish its own in-house *samulnori* quartet. Choi Jong-sil [Ch’oe Chongsil] departed the group in 1989 in order to pursue academic studies. For this reason, I opt to use the terms “classic” (see Hesselink, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 56-57) or “canonic” to refer primarily to four individuals: Kim Duk Soo, Kim Yong-bae, Lee Kwang Soo [Yi Kwangsu], and Choi Jong-sil. Kang Min-seok [Kang Minsök] became a member of the quartet in 1984, upon Kim Yong-bae’s departure. See chapter 2 of Joo Jay-youn’s “Samulnori üi yöksajök” for a discussion and critique of the errors that often appear in scholarly and journalistic descriptions of SamulNori’s early history and membership.

success of the quartet had brought with it eager converts—many of whom flocked to learn under the tutelage of the original quartet members at workshops or at the Sinch'on Live House Nanjang Studio.⁵ Nathan Hesselink describes the impact in even broader terms: “By the 1990s, SamulNori/*samul nori* in various incarnations had become a prominent fixture of the Korean musical landscape, seen on television broadcasts and in concert halls, disseminated on CD, VHS, and DVD recordings, studied in chapters of music history and appreciation textbooks, and taught at the primary, secondary, and collegiate levels throughout the peninsula.”⁶ Kim’s SamulNori Hanullim was thus a fitting appellation to describe the larger reverberations of the SamulNori quartet, while at the same time forecasting Kim’s more ambitious agendas.

Beginning the story with the quartet’s dissolution may seem an unconventional narrative move, but it strategically foregrounds SamulNori’s popular reception—a phenomenon that survived after the quartet’s demise. It also offers another way of thinking of SamulNori—not as a singular quartet that emerged fully-formed overnight—but as part of an evolving musical collaboration and cultural project. In this chapter I consider the foundations of the SamulNori quartet and the repertory of music that came to carry their name. Following a description of the setting—the Seoul-based Konggan Sarang (also known as the Space Theater) and the community of cultural activists who nurtured the “SamulNori project”—I examine the ways in which SamulNori (and its budding musical genre by the same name) first captivated listeners. Careful analysis of ethnographic interviews, oral histories, and the accounts of fans and practitioners reveals the strands of this popular reception that ultimately led to the South

⁵ The Live House Nanjang studio was officially opened on November 16, 1990 in Sinch'on (in northern Seoul). The studio served as an open space where budding *samulnori* enthusiasts could come and go, to take lessons from the SamulNori quartet members or to generally “hang out.” It was at the Sinch'on studio (often shortened to Sinch'on Nanjang) that SamulNori (and SamulNori Hanullim) began to develop their first pedagogical textbooks and notation. See SamulNori Hanullim, *SamulNori: SamulNori t'ansaeng samsip*, 82.

⁶ Hesselink, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 3.

Korean government's promotion of the quartet and their repertory of music as important symbols of Korean culture.

This analysis provides new insights into SamulNori's well-rehearsed history by introducing new voices into the fold. If at times these stories diverge from oft-cited passages of SamulNori lore, this is intentional on my part. Yet this chapter is not framed as a historiographical intervention. Rather, I direct my line of inquiry toward *reception* and toward the community of actors with whom SamulNori/*samulnori* has made a lasting impact. The following questions guide the venture: Who helped nurture the group? Why did so many people latch onto this percussion genre? What was *samulnori*'s appeal? I consider the stories my interlocutors provided about their own encounters with *samulnori*. First, I set the stage by providing the contextual background for these encounters with SamulNori, the quartet.

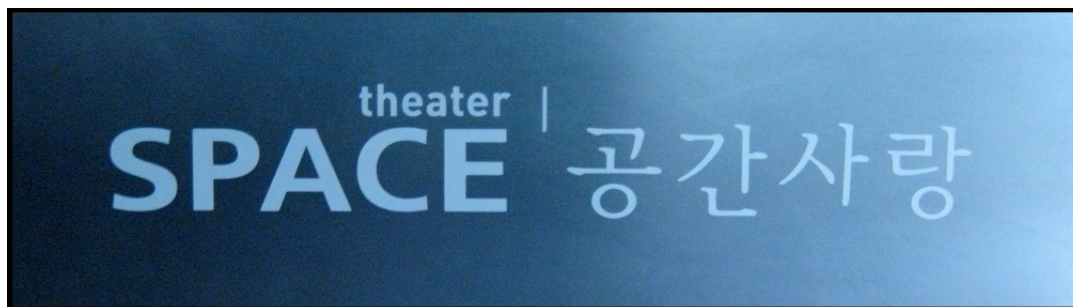


Figure 1.1 The Space Theater (Konggan Sarang/공간사랑) sign. Photograph by author.

SPACE THEATER: SETTING THE SCENE

Most of SamulNori's origin narratives begin by paying tribute to the Space Theater (Konggan Sarang/ 空間사랑 – "Love of Space"), the place where the quartet first debuted.⁷ More precisely, the small theater (소극장, *sogükchang*) located in the basement of the Konggan Group building [Konggan saok], was the site of many important performances of traditional Korean music starting in 1977. On February 11, 2009, during my fieldwork year, I had the opportunity to visit the building, which was designed by the late architect Kim Swoo Geun [Kim Sugün] (1931–86), the founder of the Space Group and a well-known patron of Korean arts and culture.⁸ My guide was Suzanna Samstag, who was SamulNori's managing director from 1983 to 1994.⁹ I first met Samstag in 2003 when I was working as the overseas coordinator for SamulNori Hanullim. That day in 2009 we took a leisurely walk from her office near the tourist-friendly Insa-dong area to the Konggan Group Building in the Wönsö neighborhood, a few blocks away from the Ch'angdök Palace. Samstag and I were granted permission to browse the premises and enter the defunct small theater, now occasionally used as a lecture hall. Following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

The small theater was true to its name, and surprisingly small. Similar to the moss-covered red brick façade of the building's exterior, the walls of the boxy, rectangular room were made entirely of brick. The room, which was located in the basement, was cold and musty. I thought to myself . . . *this* was the legendary theater in which SamulNori was born? It appeared like a spacious cellar on a good

⁷ The designations of "Space Theater" and "Konggan Sarang" were often used interchangeably in practice. Hence, I alternate between the English and Korean names for the theater in this chapter.

⁸ Kim was one of South Korea's most prominent architects of the twentieth century. His most famous projects were the Konggan [Space] Group Building (1977), Masan Catholic Church (1979) and the Seoul Olympic Stadium built for the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

⁹ Although sometimes referred to in publications and by the Korean media as Suzanna Samstag Oh, I have chosen to use the name "Suzanna Samstag" in this dissertation.

day, an underground cell on a gloomy one. There was no stage, no set of curtains, no proscenium to speak of. But there *were* stage lights affixed to battens on the ceiling. It hardly seemed like 100 people could fit into that space, along with the performers. Suzanna explained that large cushioned blocks were arranged on the floor, staggered like stairs. It was first-come, first-serve, and people “squished together on the blocks,” sat on the floor, or watched from the upper level of the space. The SamulNori musicians would perform seated on the floor, or do a *p’an kut* [performance of dance and drumming, inspired by *p’ungmul*] in that tiny area at the far end of the room.¹⁰



Figure 1.2. The small theater (*sogŭkchang*/소극장) in 2009. Photographs by author.

There were no trappings of grand theatrical gestures and stage designs in Kim Swoo Geun’s small theater. Yet there were subtle designs that synthesized both form and function—from the dressing room that was tucked behind the decorative archways to the narrow, upper-tiered level that once serviced the production staff. What Samstag and I viewed was a functional and unpretentious theater that had moved past its prime. The bricks and mortar were structurally sound, but the essence that once constituted the Space Theater no longer remained.¹¹ The austerity of the physical space left me with the impression that what occupied center stage must have been the gatherings of musicians, actors, and

¹⁰ Author’s fieldnotes, February 11–12, 2009.

¹¹ Samstag and I visited the building again at a later date, when we met with a staff member of the Konggan Group. He asked our advice on how to revive the Konggan Sarang, and reestablish it as an arts center in Seoul.

audience members in the theater's operative years. Kang Joon-hyuk [Kang Chunhyök], the artistic programming director for Konggan, commented on the minimalistic nature of the theater's space and how that was utilized to advantage:

[Konggan] wasn't an example of a proscenium stage—there was no such operative concept. That's likely what people dubbed it, though, since it seemed [superficially] to meet some of the criteria. But there was really no place to call a "stage" as such, no seats. . . You place seats in that open space, and that becomes the seated areas, and the remaining area will become a stage. So to call it a conventional theater would really be a misnomer. I think the only way you could characterize Konggan would be to call it an experimental stage.¹²

Kang's "experimental stage" (or black box theater) intimated the diverse range of events held at Konggan and the different varieties of spatial configurations accorded to performances in the theater. In its 1980s heyday the *space* of the Space Theater was an almost avant-garde venue in Seoul that brought together a coterie of like-minded individuals, interested in cultural activism and the performing arts.¹³

Kang, who had a background in Western classical music and a degree in aesthetics (미학/美學) from Seoul National University, presided over the programming of artistic events, which spanned the genres of classical music to drama and dance. Regular series included the "Evening of Ballet," "Evening of Jazz," and puppet theater. Space was also the first small theater of its kind actively sponsoring and promoting traditional Korean music, known as *kugak* (국악/國樂, literally, "Korean music"), inaugurating the "Evening of Traditional Music" series in 1978.¹⁴ Many of South Korea's most famous and revered

¹² Kang Joon-hyuk, interview, September 8, 2009. In 1977 Kim Swoo Geun selected Kang as the artistic programmer for the newly opened Space Theater.

¹³ The Konggan Building also had other attractions—a coffee shop, gallery, and outdoor courtyard complete with pagoda (in addition to the theater and the company's offices).

¹⁴ For a summary of the types of events programmed at Space Theater from 1977 to 1989, see Appendix 1.

traditional musicians (e.g., *p'ansori* artists Kim Sohŭi and Im Pang'ul; *kayagŭm* player Pak Kwihŭi; dancer Yi Maebang) performed at the theater. This sponsored presentation of *kugak* was facilitated in large part through Kim Swoo Geun's work as a cultural activist and his personal interest in preserving and revitalizing Korean traditional arts and culture.¹⁵ A year prior to the opening of the Space Theater in April 1977, Kim commented on his vision for creating a public space for the arts:

Beyond providing the place to nurture traditional arts, as a theater space, we aim to expand the possibilities and cultivate creative work. The small theater was built in a way so that its form could facilitate the creation of new [types of] theatrical plays. But besides theater, there are also plans to present the best quality chamber music, and to have monthly musical appreciation concerts of *p'ansori*.¹⁶

It was in this spirit of experimentation and innovation along with an emphasis on the preservation of traditional arts, then, that a monthly series of *kugak* was first conceptualized by Kim and executed by Kang.¹⁷ February 22–23, 1978, marked the first installment of the “Evening of Traditional Music” series.¹⁸ In this program a group of traditional Korean music specialists who were part of the Minsok akhoe Sinawi (Folk music society “Sinawi”) performed a selection of pieces.¹⁹ At the end of the evening a new work was debuted. Four musicians—Kim Duk Soo, Ch'oe T'aehyŏn, Kim Yong-bae, and

¹⁵ For a rigorous exploration of Kim's role as an activist, impresario, and “cultural historian,” see Delissen's “Aesthetic Pasts of Space.”

¹⁶ Kang Jae Hoon's [Kang Chaehun] Master's thesis includes a section of the interview with Kim Swoo Geun quoted in *Choson Ilbo*, March 8, 1976. See Kang, “Kihoek kongyŏnjang,” 31.

¹⁷ Kang Joon-hyuk, interview, September 8, 2009.

¹⁸ Prior to this, there had been concerts at Konggan Sarang under the series title “Evening of Traditional Arts.” See Appendix 1.

¹⁹ Members of the Minsok akhoe Sinawi were graduates of the Seoul Arts School. See Ch'oe “Minsok akhoe Sinawi” for a summary of the group's history (Korean only) and Hesselink, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 51–56.

Yi Chongdae—performed a percussion “improvisation” called “Uttari P’ungmul” (웃다리 풍물) which was a sampling of the various rhythmic patterns from *p’ungmul* forms of the Kyŏnggi and Ch’ungch’ŏng provinces of Korea.²⁰ Kim Duk Soo, Ch’oe T’aehyŏn, and Yi Chongdae were members of the Minsok akhoe Sinawi group, but only Kim Duk Soo and Kim Yong-bae were bona fide percussionists trained in the *p’ungmul* and *namsadang* traditions.²¹ Ch’oe had majored in *haegŭm* (two-string spike fiddle) and Lee specialized in wind instruments.²² The reception of that first performance was unexpectedly enthusiastic, and it has since been inscribed with mythic import as the “birth of SamulNori” (사물놀이의 탄생) and reproduced in countless articles and books and in SamulNori’s own press materials. While there are many discrepancies between actual events and what I identify as SamulNori lore, my objective here, as noted, is not to rewrite SamulNori history but to focus on narratives from ethnographic and historical research that shape our understanding of SamulNori’s early popular reception.²³

²⁰ Although the term “improvisation” may be slightly misleading on first reading, I employ this word to reflect the spirit of experimentation that accompanied the first performance (at Konggan) of the synthesized arrangement of rhythms drawn from *p’ungmul*.

²¹ The *namsadang* (남사당/男寺黨) were itinerant groups of male entertainers who traveled from village to village in exchange for food and shelter during the mid to late Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910). In addition to performing *p’ungmul*, the *namsadang* also performed acts such as tightrope walking, masked dance, acrobatics, and saucer spinning. By the middle of the twentieth century, the *namsadang* troupes had dwindled in numbers and found it increasingly difficult to sustain a nomadic lifestyle (especially within the context of the Korean War [1950-1953] and its aftermath). Kim Duk Soo and Kim Yong-bae had direct connections to *namsadang* troupes through kinship (i.e. Kim Duk Soo’s father was a member) and membership (i.e. Kim Yong-bae was a former member of the Seoul-based *namsadang* troupe). Both Kims were familiar with the music and dance of *p’ungmul* through their affiliations with the *namsadang*. Nathan Hesselink has provided English translations of key passages from Sim Usŏng’s definitive work on the *namsadang* in his recent manuscript, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 17-37. Korean readers may also consult Sim’s original text: Sim, *Namsadangp’ae yŏn’gu*.

²² In addition to *puk* (barrel drum), Yi played the *p’iri* (small double reed instrument) and the *taegŭm* (transverse bamboo flute).

²³ For a general understanding of SamulNori’s history, see Joo, “Samulnori ūi yŏksajŏk”; Hesselink, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*; Howard’s *Creating Korean Music* (chapters 1-3), and Kim, *Kim Hŏnsŏn ūi samulnori iyagi*.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SAMULNORI

A symposium organized by SamulNori Hanullim in 2006 brought together experts and scholars to reflect on SamulNori's past, present, and future. Reflecting on SamulNori's "past," KangJoon-hyuk discussed the reception of the experimental performance by the four percussionists in February 1978, and its unexpected impact. For its significance as one of the few published first-person accounts of the February performance (and the limited availability of the symposium proceedings), I also include the original Korean text for reference.

On that day, the audience heard *p'ungmul* (*nongak*) being performed in a seated position for the very first time.²⁴ The *karak* (rhythms) themselves were old since they were steeped in the world of *nongak*; rather it was the configuration of such rhythmic patterns that was new. If in the past, the people who came to see *nongak* were spectators, then on that day, these were the curiously inquisitive who came to see a musical performance—thus, an audience. In other words, it was the first performance of its kind where we were able to focus more on the auditory dimensions over the visual ones in our [*p'ungmul*] rhythms. It was a revelation to both the performers themselves and the audience alike that our rhythms were this diverse, charming, exciting and energetic.

그 날 청중들은 처음으로 앉아서 연주하는 풍물 (농악) 을 들었다. 가락 자체는 이미 예전 농악 속에 있었던 것이었으나 그 구성은 새로운 것이었다. 예전의 농악을 구경하는 사람들이 [관객] 입장이었다면 이날의 구경꾼들은 음악회의 [청중] 이었다. 즉 시각적인 요소를 줄이고 청각적인 구성으로만 우리 가락을 전해준 최초의 공연이었다. 연주하는 사람들이나 청중들이나 우리의 가락이 이렇게 다양하고 아기자기하고 흥겹고 힘찬 음악인 줄을 새삼 깨닫게 되었다.²⁵

Kang's testimony conveys the sense of wonder that audience members felt at hearing something that was at once familiar and novel. Although Koreans were well acquainted with the sounds of *p'ungmul* as part

²⁴ *Nongak* 농악/農樂 (literally, "farming music") is sometimes used interchangeably with *p'ungmul* 풍물/風物 ("objects of the wind"). Although the term *nongak* has been problematized and contested by scholars and practitioners alike in recent decades, some practitioners and groups still use *nongak* to describe their musical tradition (e.g. Imsil P'ilbong Nongak of the North Chölla region). For a brief summary of this debate, see Hesselink, *P'ungmul: South Korean Drumming and Dance*, 15-16.

²⁵ Kang, "Samulnori kongyön yangsik üi yöksa," 11.

of Korea's folk heritage, the setting for the performance of "Uttari p'ungmul" at Konggan was a drastic change from *p'ungmul*'s original context.²⁶ The quartet took music that was traditionally performed by large percussion ensembles outdoors (for hours at a time, by large groups of people) and streamlined it to maximum effect in their performance at Konggan's newly opened "experimental theater." But to suggest a slightly more nuanced narrative—the experimental percussion "improvisation" was not the only unusual programming note of the evening. Kang's first "Evening of Traditional Music" concerts on February 22-23, 1978 also included another piece by the name of "*ch'wit'a*"—formerly a type of military band processional music.²⁷ Like *p'ungmul*, *ch'wit'a* required a moderate-to-large ensemble formation and was traditionally performed outdoors on wind and percussion instruments. In its adaptation by members of the Korean traditional music group who headlined the "Evening of Traditional Music" performances, the emphasis shifted more towards the musical interaction between the different instruments and away from the choreographic elements present in its outdoor setting.²⁸ Little appears to be written on the performance of the "Ch'wit'a han pat'ang" at the Space Theater, however. The true breakthrough was indeed the finale of the evening, and the premiere of "Uttari p'ungmul"—which later came to be known to the Korean general public as the debut performance by SamulNori.²⁹

²⁶ See chapter 2 for a general description of *p'ungmul*. For a more detailed description of the instruments that are used in *samulnori*, see Hesselink, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 143-149.

²⁷ Kim Swoo Geun's *Konggan Magazine* (see Konggan, "Traditional Arts") includes a brief description of the program from the first "Evening of Traditional Music" performances on February 22-23, 1978 at the Space Theater. In addition to the "Uttari p'ungmul" piece, an instrumental "*kömungo sanjo*" (*sanjo* instrumental piece performed on the *kömungo* zither and accompanied by drum) and "ch'wit'a han pat'ang" (취타 한바탕) were also on the program.

²⁸ Nathan Hesselink writes that the "Ch'wit'a han pat'ang" was first presented by members of the Minsok akhoe Sinawi on December 24, 1977 at a YMCA in Seoul. See Hesselink, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 55.

²⁹ It is important to note that at this point, the quartet had not yet solidified or even become known as "SamulNori." Still, in the self-reflective discourse produced by SamulNori and the SamulNori Hanullim organization, the February 1978 performance looms large as a point of origin.

Kang's programming for the event was very much aligned with the Space Group's philosophy of being at the vanguard of innovation while maintaining a firm sense of tradition.³⁰ The mouthpiece of Kim Swoo Geun—the experimental arts and culture magazine (also known as *Konggan*)—frequently inscribed Kim's vision and a desire to reconcile nation, history, identity, and progress in its very pages. Alain Delissen's meticulous survey and analysis of the *Konggan* publications from 1960-1990 paint a portrait of Kim as an ardent cultural nationalist who was simultaneously invested in researching and reclaiming Korea's "lost" history while also contributing to its modern infrastructure as an architect. Delissen aptly describes the Kim's *Konggan* project as "Korean history without a historian,"—where the assembled team of writers and contributors "strove to elaborate Korean identity through aesthetics and aesthetics through history."³¹ The title page of a volume published in 1976 proclaims a mission statement that appeared in various iterations throughout the magazine's publication history:

We will think over tradition and history of the arts and various questions on the environment. We will try to help each Korean to know better about his nation and himself. And we will report, record and study the situation in which he lives. We are going to go forth bravely with him to the better future that is desirable to all of us.³²

Delissen selects a similarly spirited passage from a ten-year commemorative issue in 1975—one that illustrates how the *Konggan* project attempted to ameliorate and reconcile the fundamental tension

³⁰ This is a point that Nathan Hesselink dwells on in many of his scholarly works, positing an expansionist view of what is construed as "tradition." For a development of this line of thinking, see Hesselink, "Samul nori as Traditional" and *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*.

³¹ Delissen, "Aesthetic Pasts of Space," 243.

³² I was able to review the *Konggan* periodicals (1972-1989) at the Harvard-Yenching Library in 2005. The quote from the title page appears on page 103 of Volume 11, No. 1, 1976.

between retaining Korean culture and tradition while charting paths in the name of “progress” and modernization.

Konggan turns over and revives the tradition and history of a field that covers arts, environment, architecture. Turned to the future we judge desirable, we do record, set in order and criticize what our present is made of. For the Koreans to know Korea better and better, *Konggan*’s content, even when embedded in the most contemporary issues, enriches the spirit of present day Koreans and the more brilliant it is, the more it enhances the dignity in Koreans’ lives. Our ambition is to bear witness of our values to the distant future.³³

The magazine’s glossy pages devoted much attention to traditional Korean music genres, and often featured detailed pictorial essays of village rituals or dance genres.³⁴ A sample of the article titles reveals the magazine’s scholarly inclinations: “Instrumental music for *dure* [*ture*: cooperative labor unit] in Kosan in Daegu,” “Character of Korean Traditional Music,” and “What is *kut* [shamanistic ritual]?”³⁵ If the *Konggan* magazine served as a grassroots historiographical project for the Korean public through informative pieces on so-called “threatened” cultural practices, then the Space Theater was the logical site to stage the performances of Korea’s artistic heritage. Here, Kim’s integrated cultural enterprise (*Konggan* magazine) merged his architectural projects (Konggan Group building) with his vested interest in resuscitating Korea’s traditional arts.

³³ As quoted in Delissen, “Aesthetic Past of *Space*,” 245.

³⁴ It should be noted that the *Konggan* magazine is still in circulation, and is known as one of the leading publications of visual culture, design, and architecture from Korea.

³⁵ Chung Byung-ho [Chong Pyŏngho], “Instrumental Music for *dure*,” 140-145; Hwang Byung-ki, [Hwang Pyŏnggi] “Characteristics of Korean Music,” 62-65; Sim Usŏng, “What is *kut* (and what studies have there been on it)?,” 80-84.

Kim Duk Soo explained in his 2007 autobiography that it was the folklorist Sim Usöng (b. 1934) who first suggested that Kim take the four primary percussion instruments from *p'ungmul* (*changgo*, *puk*, *kkwaenggwari*, and *ching*) and “create a performance program with them, playing in a seated position.” Kim acknowledged that Sim’s proposal was a “tremendous idea” and recalled that he was “full of excitement and anticipation” at trying out this bold experiment on that “unforgettable evening.”³⁶

Before moving on, it is necessary to address Sim Usöng’s central role in supporting the new percussion ensemble. Although he has worn many hats, Sim is perhaps best regarded for his work as a researcher of the folk performing arts and culture of Korea. During the 1960s he began extensive research on the tradition of itinerant performing arts troupes known *yurang tanch’e*, focusing in particular on the *namsadang* (male itinerant troupes).³⁷ Sim was one of the first generation of Korean folklorists to conduct ethnographic fieldwork with Korean folk musicians; in particular, with members of the Seoul-based *namsadang* troupe. Through his *namsadang* research and his tenure as an instructor of Korean music history at the Seoul Arts School, Sim met Kim Duk Soo—a student at the school and son of Kim Munhak (a specialist of the *sogo* handheld-drum dance), who was a member of the 1960s Minsokkühoe Namsadang [Folk Theater Association Namsadang] and formerly of the Sim Sönok troupe.³⁸ Sim also met Kim Yong-bae and Lee Kwang Soo, members of the Seoul-based *namsadang* troupe in the 1970s, and served as the faculty advisor for the Minsok akhoe Sinawi ensemble at the Seoul

³⁶ Kim, *Gülloböl kwangdae Kim Tök-su*, 181–82. In an interview conducted with Choi Jong-sil on March 4, 2009, however, Choi gives credit to Ch’oe T’aehyön for having first proposed the idea of performing in a seated position. See Choi, “Ch’oe Chongsil i marhanün samulnori,” 144.

³⁷ See footnote number 21, earlier in this chapter.

³⁸ Hesselink, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 32; Sim, *Namsadangp’ae yön’gu*, 53. The high school’s name has changed to Seoul Arts High School.

Arts School. It was Sim who was in fact the link between the Minsok akhoe Sinawi group (a name he also coined) and the Konggan Group's CEO, Kim Swoo Geun. From this connection arose the performing artists roster at the Space Theater in its early years.

Sim is generally credited with bestowing on the quartet the name “samul nori” (四物 놀이, “the play of four things,” representing the four types of percussion instruments) sometime after the fledgling group's second experiment of performing an arrangement of rhythms from the southeastern region of Korea.³⁹ In this April performance at Konggan Sarang, the two non-percussionists Ch'oe and Yi were replaced by two brothers from the southern port city of Samch'önp'o—Choi Jong-sil and Choi Jong-sok [Ch'oe Chongsök]—who served as faithful guides for the exploration of Chinju Samch'önp'o *nongak* (*p'ungmul* rhythms from the southeastern region of Korea).⁴⁰ This performance also received a warm reception, and it prompted the necessity for the quartet to have an official name.⁴¹ Although there are discrepancies in the record and in oral testimonies as to precisely when and where the bestowal of the group's moniker occurred, the name SamulNori stuck.⁴² In an essay commissioned for SamulNori's thirtieth anniversary, Sim wrote about the conferral of the quartet's name: “Well, if only four people are

³⁹ The word, *nori* (놀이), has many semantic meanings in the Korean language. Aside from “play,” it can also mean “entertainment” or “game.” Since the SamulNori Hanullim group prefers to render *nori* as “play,” I have opted for that translation.

⁴⁰ After consulting with numerous programs and sources, Joo Jay-youn lists this second performance date as April 18, 1978, with the following line-up: Kim Duk Soo, Kim Yong-bae, Choi Jong-sil, and Choi Jong-sok [Ch'oe Chongsök]. See Joo, “Samulnori üi yöksajök,” 33. (Under its 1980 “Traditional Arts” [Listing of Performances and Events at Konggan Sarang], an “Evening of Traditional Dance” was scheduled at Konggan Sarang on April 18-22, 1978.) In an interview, Choi Jong-sil mentioned that he and his elder brother (who was skilled at playing the small gong) had grown up playing the regional *p'ungmul* style of Songp'o *nongak*, which was later subsumed into Samch'önp'o *nongak*. See Choi, “Ch'oe Chongsil i marhanün samulnori,” 140-141.

⁴¹ Joo, “Samulnori üi yöksajök,” 28.

⁴² In a 2009 interview I conducted with Sim, he recounted that he was approached by Ch'oe T'aehyön and other members of the Minsok akhoe Sinawi group (Yi Ch'ölju and Kim Mukyöng) in haste at a teacher's office at the Seoul Arts School (서울예술학교) in the spring of 1978. The members asked Sim to quickly coin a name for the percussion quartet that was becoming surprisingly popular at the Space Theater concerts.

performing, why don't you call it—'sa mul' (four objects)? And if you're playing with the *samul* [set of instruments], why don't you say, 'sa mul nori' [play]?"⁴³

According to Joo Jay-youn, managing director of SamulNori Hanullim, the first documented reference of the name "SamulNori" in a program was the spring "Korean Folk Music Concert" (tenth regular performance) by members of the Minsok akhoe Sinawi on March 1, 1979. In this concert the newly named SamulNori quartet, with musicians Kim Duk Soo, Kim Yong-bae, Choi Jong-sil, and Choi Jong-sök, were featured third on the program. Identified simply as "Kyöngsang nongak," (경상농악) the quartet performed their arrangement of various rhythms culled from the *p'unngmul* (*nongak*) traditions of the Kyöngsang (southeastern) region of Korea. The program pamphlet and accompanying text are included here for reference, and used by permission from SamulNori Hanullim.

⁴³ "그래... 넷이서만 한다면 사(4)물이고, 사물로만 논다면 '사물놀이'가 어떨지?" Sim, "SamulNori ManManse!," 16.

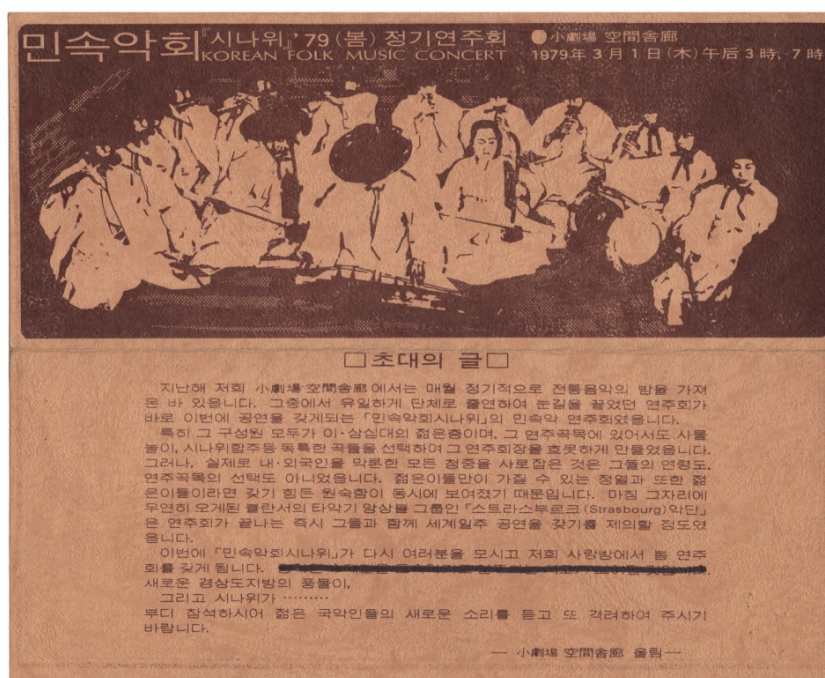


Figure 1.3. Minsok akhoe Sinawi program, front, March 1, 1979. (Following is a transcription of the back of this program).

PROGRAM

Suchech'ön-----Minsok akhoe members

Ajaeng sanjo----- Park Chongsŏn

(invited guest)

SamulNori-----Kim Duk Soo, Kim Yong-bae,
Choi Jong-sok,⁴⁴ Choi Jong-sil

Kyöngsang nongak
(*p'ungmul* rhythms from the Kyöngsang region)

열림굿놀이 - 길군악놀이 - 반길군악놀이 -
 덧배기벽구놀이 - 반 다드래기 - 자진열림벽구놀이 -
 영상 다드래기, [별거리, 달거리] - 오방진놀이 -
 굿거리놀이 - 덧배기놀이 - 쌍진풀이 (호호굿) -
 삼차굿놀이 (개인놀이)

Sinawi hapchu-----Minsok Akhoe members⁴⁵

⁴⁴ In what is an apparently a typographical error in the program, Choi Jong-sok's (최종석) name is incorrectly printed as Choi Jongsik (최종식). I thank Suzanna Samstag for calling Choi Jong-sil on my behalf in order to confirm this detail.

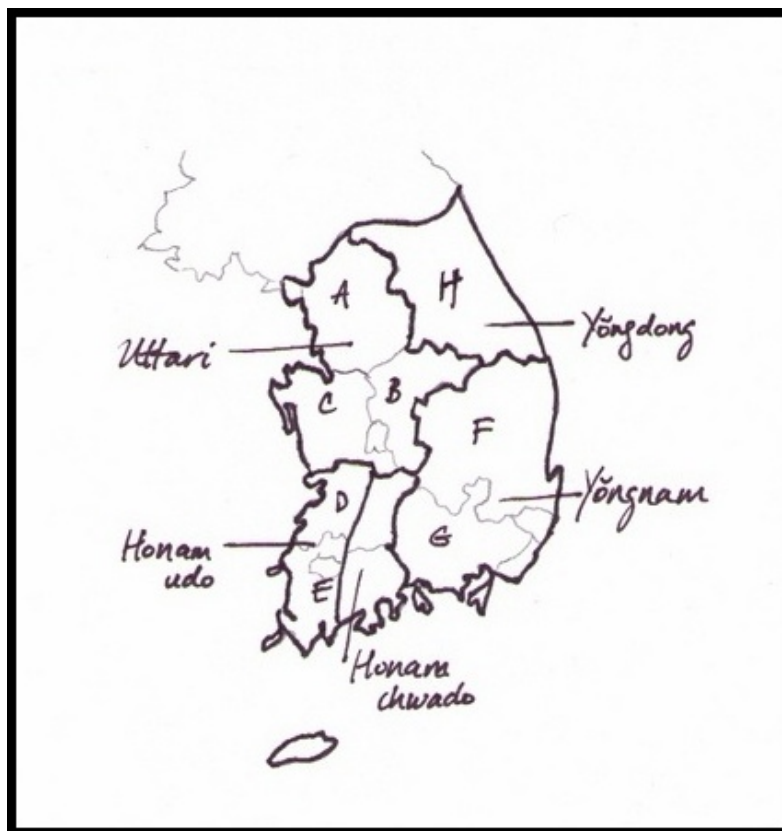


Figure 1.4. Five regional styles of *p'ungmul*: Uttari (A: Kyönggi province; B: North Ch'ungch'öng province; C: South Ch'ungch'öng province); Honam udo (D: North Chölla province; E: South Chölla province); Honam chwado (D: North Chölla province; E: South Chölla province); Yöngnam (F: North Kyöngsang province; G: South Kyöngsang province); Yöngdong (H: Kangwön province).

With each new performance premiere over the next few years, the quartet's repertoire expanded and developed in an organic manner. The rhythms of *p'ungmul* provided the musical grammar for SamulNori's experiments in reconfiguring their own "language"—perhaps more appropriately dubbed a speedy, urban dialect of *p'ungmul*. Interestingly, these musical explorations were always informed by the sonic specificities of place—each "piece" was an interpretation or "rearrangement" (재구성) of rhythmic patterns from regional variants of *p'ungmul*—Uttari, Yöngnam (Kyöngsang nongak) and in

⁴⁵ The sequence of rhythms for "Kyöngsang Nongak" was as follows: öllim kut nori, kil kunak nori, pan-gil kunak nori, töppaegi pökku nori, pan tadüraegi, chajin öllim pökku nori, yöngsang tadüraegi, (pyölgöri, talgöri), obangjin nori, kut köri nori, töppaegi nori, ssangjin p'uri (hoho kut), and samch'a kut nori (kaein nori).

April 1979, the Honam southwestern regions of Korea. As a result of this thirst for new repertory, the members of the quartet became a de facto study group. In 1979 the group also researched the rhythmic patterns associated with Korean shamanic music (무속음악), learning directly from shamans.⁴⁶

The quartet itself was fluid in its first two years, with personnel changes occurring until Lee Kwang Soo [Yi Kwangsu] officially joined the group in 1980.⁴⁷ Lee came from Yesan county of the south Ch'ungch'öng province, and was son to a father who was part of a *namsadang* troupe in Yesan.⁴⁸ Lee had met Kim Yong-bae through their membership in the Seoul-based *namsadang* troupe that Sim Usöng fostered in the 1970s.⁴⁹ Initially, Lee passed on Kim's first offer to join the quartet, but then later decided to enlist, replacing Choi Jong-sok.

On September 29, 1980, the Space Theater gave the SamulNori quartet (with new member Lee Kwang Soo in tow) its own billing for the first time. Prior to this, the quartet had performed under the umbrella of the Minsok akhoe Sinawi, and as part of a varied line-up. The concert marked the first official performance of what has often come to be referred to as the "original" SamulNori quartet (Kim Duk Soo, Kim Yong-bae, Choi Jong-sil, and Lee Kwang Soo) or SamulNori's "original members" (사물놀이 원 멤버).

⁴⁶ Joo, "Samulnori üi yöksajök," 33.

⁴⁷ In an interview, Lee confirmed that he first joined the SamulNori quartet as a member in 1980, marking his official debut on September 29. See Lee, "Lee Kwang Soo ka marhanün samulnori," 125-126.

⁴⁸ See Lee Kwang Soo ka marhanün samulnori," 119-120.

⁴⁹ Sim's *Namsadangp'ae yon'gu* includes photographs of the members of the 1970s Seoul-based *namsadang* troupe. Kim Yong-bae and Lee Kwang Soo are pictured.

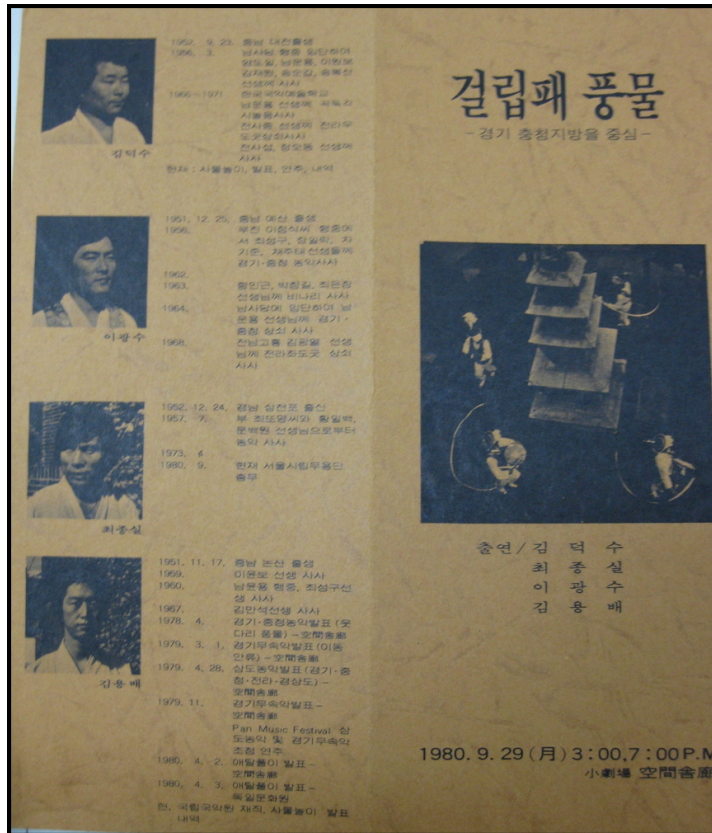


Figure 1.5. “Köllipp’ae p’ungmul”—the SamulNori quartet’s first solo performance at the Space Theater. (Followed by an abbreviated transcription of the program.) © SamulNori Hanullim.

PROGRAM

“Köllipp’ae p’ungmul”

Performers:

Kim Duk Soo, Choi Jong-sil, Lee Kwang Soo, Kim Yong-bae

문곡	Mun kut
당산곡	Tangsan kut
조왕곡	Chowang kut
터주곡	Töju kut
우물곡	Umul kut
비나리	Pinari
물소지	Mul soji
판곡	P'an kut

If SamulNori's performances of "Uddari p'unmul," (1978) "Samch'önp'o 12-cha," (1978) and "Honam udo karak" (1979) were inspired by the musical logic and the regional inflections of *p'unmul*, then the 1980 "Köllipp'ae" program was a direct claim to the *namsadang* ancestry of its performers. It was also the first program where the quartet introduced the elements of dance and song into their expanding repertoire. Lee Kwang Soo, known for his singing abilities, took the lead with the "Pinari" narrative prayer blessing, which he had learned through his *namsadang* membership. According to Keith Howard, who compared Lee's "Pinari" with recordings made by the Seoul-based *namsadang* troupe, Lee's rendition of the "Pinari" did not stray far from the version he learned in his youth.⁵⁰ Interestingly, the "Pinari" was placed towards the end of SamulNori's experimental "Köllipp'ae" program—a sequential ordering that would change drastically in later years when the "Pinari" would then become the usual opener in a SamulNori standard program.

From this point on, the SamulNori quartet began to perform *both* seated and standing versions of their pieces. In the image selected for the concert pamphlet, the musicians were photographed from above, circling the pagoda in the atrium of the Space Group building.⁵¹ Three tasseled hats (*sangmo*) are captured in mid-spin, with white streamers creating arcs around the respective performers. Of the different types of *namsadang* troupes, the *köllipp'ae* (걸림패 - fund-raising troupe) maintained the strongest association with Buddhism. According to Sim Usöng's study of the *namsadang*, the *köllipp'ae* would travel around the Korean peninsula, typically sojourning at Buddhist temples. In exchange for

⁵⁰ Howard, "Creating Korean Music," 16.

⁵¹ Architect Kim Swoo Geun's Konggan Saok (Space Group building) was distinguished by its modern façade interspersed with elements from traditional Korean architecture. Figure 1.6 provides a glimpse of the stone pagoda and also a *hanok* (Korean traditional house) structure in the background.

food from the monastic communities, the “fund-raising troupe” would perform acts like the *pinari* (narrative prayer song) and the *tangsan kut* (a ritual drawn from shamanistic ceremonies).⁵² Because I draw upon the “Pinari” later on in this dissertation, Nathan Hesselink’s English translation of Sim’s analysis of the *köllipp’ae* is particularly instructive here:

Also related to Buddhist temples, but with expanded skills and responsibilities, were *köllipp’ae* (also called *pinarip’ae* [*pinari* troupe]). Literally meaning “fund-raising troupe,” a typical group was composed of fifteen or so male members organized hierarchically under a top-ranking *hwaju* (leader). Their primary function was to perform household rituals for individual families on behalf of a local Buddhist temple. After a dramatic prelude or pre-show in which the troupe would perform percussion music and dance (*p’ungmul*), mask dance, and (depending on the skills of the members) bowl spinning, they would then engage in a series of propitiatory rituals for the deities of the living quarters, kitchen, and domestic well. Once the majority of the household rituals had been completed, the troupe would then conclude with a *sōngju kut* (house god ritual). This performance of percussion and vocal music featured the recitation of a ritual offering (*pinari*); during and after this concluding ritual, grain and money were collected as payment. *Köllipp’ae* activity was absorbed into the local (rural) *p’ungmul* scene sometime during the Chosŏn period, and it continues to be an important component of student-based and community-led *p’ungmul* organizations in modern times. The *namsadang* would take on many of the *köllipp’ae*’s roles in the early twentieth century.⁵³

⁵² Sim, *Namsadangp’ae yŏn’gu*, 27-30.

⁵³ Hesselink, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 21-22.



Figure 1.6. Stone pagoda in the atrium of the Space Building. Photograph by author.

From this point on, the *mun kut* (ritual performed at a gate), *pinari* (narrative blessing), and *p'an kut* (drumming accompanied by dance and acrobatics) began to be incorporated into the quartet's regular performances.⁵⁴ Other elements on the "Köllipp'ae p'ungmul" program were not as successful at finding their ways into later performances, and were eventually dismissed. The combination of the *mun kut/pinari* and *p'an kut* became the book-ends for what eventually formed the standard ninety-minute SamulNori program—a sequence of compositions that continues to be performed today. With the classic SamulNori quartet formation now in place, and a growing buzz over the quartet's dynamic performances, the group began to take off both literally and metaphorically. In the midst of travel to various theaters in and around Seoul, the group continued to research the abundance of *p'ungmul*'s genetic material—eventually creating the "Samdo söl changgo karak" (rhythms culled from three regions, played on four *changgo* drums) and "Samdo nongak karak," (rhythms from three regions, played on the *samul* instruments). This rush of creativity and experimentation early on in SamulNori's history

⁵⁴ SamulNori's version of the "P'an kut"—a difficult term to define yet easy to grasp in situ—is drawn from both *p'ungmul* and *namsadang* traditions. The more acrobatic segments that are the usual crowd pleasers, derive from the latter.

was in due part a product of their association with the experimental space of the Space Theater, groups such as the Minsok akhoe Sinawi, and advocates such as Kang Joon-hyuk and Kim Swoo Geun.

EARLY RECEPTION

I turn now to the reception of SamulNori and the genre of music that they created. What was it about the music or the performances by the quartet that so captivated early audiences? As already mentioned, Kang Joon-hyuk suggested that it was the novelty of the quartet's seated position, which focused the spotlight on the diversity of rhythms in *p'ungmul*'s regional variants. For others, what piqued interest was the exploratory musical journey on which the quartet embarked—with each concert came a new experiment in creating new repertoire from old materials. Suzanna Samstag, my guide to the Konggan theater, reminisced about the sociality of the Space Theater, and the word-of-mouth effect that drew in SamulNori's crowds.

The Space Theater (Konggan Sarang) where SamulNori first performed was a small venue, seating only about 100 people. Initially, it started out with programs on traditional Korean dance [and music], where maybe only 20 or 30 people would be in attendance. After word got out about SamulNori, the theater would be totally crowded, standing room only. People would tell their friends to come, and pretty soon there was this group of true believers who were trying to find something sacred.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Suzanna Samstag, interview, November 22, 2005.



Figure 1.7. SamulNori Quartet (left to right): Lee Kwang Soo, Kim Yong-bae, Kim Duk Soo, and Choi Jong-sil. Space Theater, 1981. Photo courtesy of Sim Usŏng.

By 1981, one year after solidifying its membership, the SamulNori quartet had received invitations to other theaters and venues, such as the Madang Sesil Theater, the Sejong Center for the Performing Arts, and the UNESCO hall in Seoul. In 1982 SamulNori made their international debut, performing in Japan and in a month-long U.S. tour.⁵⁶ As their success began to extend beyond national boundaries, a corresponding reappraisal of Korean traditional music occurred in the domestic context.

Journalist Ku Hisŏ was an avid fan of and supporter of the group. Her writings shaped much of the early reception of SamulNori for the broader Korean public. She was also one of the appointed journalists for Kim Swoo Geun's *Konggan* magazine. Ku's essay "Korean Spirit, Korean Rhythm," written in 1983 for *Konggan*, provided the context for readers first encountering SamulNori through the printed word. She narrated SamulNori's development at the Space Theater as an experimental quartet into a rigorous study group intent on researching and re-interpreting Korea's musical heritage.

⁵⁶ SamulNori's first performances in the United States included visits to the Disney World Epcot Center (World Showcase Festival), Soundscape Theater (New York), Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), Dean Acheson Auditorium (Washington D.C., upon an invitation from the State Department), and the Korean Cultural Service in Los Angeles. For a more complete listing of SamulNori's performance history from 1978-1988 (compiled meticulously by Suzanna Samstag), see SamulNori, *SamulNori/10 Years*.

SamulNori's 1982 tour highlights were also provided as details to cultivate the domestic reception of the quartet that was making headway in American cities. For this, the Korean public should take heed, Ku noted:

Whether it was by attempting to theorize and actually organize the regional characteristics of *nongak*'s rhythmic cycles, or participate as performers in a *kut pan* [*kut* ritual gathering] for several months in order to learn the rhythms associated with shamanistic music, these performers' efforts are testimony to tears shed during the learning process.

As a result of these valiant efforts, not only have the stereotypical myths about the triteness, monotony, and noisy clatter of *nongak* (and other traditional percussion music) been completely shattered, but [we hear] the rhythms that have long lived within our *minjung* [people]—this elegance has entered into hearts today and awakened our own voice.⁵⁷

The Korean musicologist Han Myung-hee [Han Myŏngghi] echoes this nationalistic sentiment but places the SamulNori phenomenon in a more sociohistorical context:

By the end of the 1970s, many Koreans had come to an important point in the process of self-awareness, which included growing interest in Korean Studies and the traditional performing arts. Politically the power structure was pressing heavily on the people's consciousness. Tear gas-filled university campuses, anger, frustration and low morale characterized the consciousness of citizens. It was during these times that SamulNori made its debut and spread its message through the seeming madness. The music provided an antidote to the heartbreak of the era. But interest in the music was not momentary. The music provided a release, an experience of group ecstasy and a way, through nostalgia for the past, for us to find ourselves.⁵⁸

To American-born Suzanna Samstag, however, what appealed most about the SamulNori quartet were the electrifying performances. On hearing a particular 1981 arrangement for four *changgos*

⁵⁷ Ku, "Korean Spirit, Korean Rhythm," 98-99.

⁵⁸ Han, "Samulnori: Providing a Musical Release," 35.

(“Samdo söl changgo karak”), Samstag recounts, the music “literally tore through my body.”⁵⁹ The four musicians were more or less equal in terms of their training. On stage, this synergy of talent sometimes resulted in the young musicians trying to one up each other on stage. The audience became spectators to what was transpiring in performance; witnessing this “turf war” left one breathless with anticipation. Samstag admitted that she was similarly impressed by the physicality of the dancing and the sheer athleticism of the performers—who despite being thin were at the top of their form.

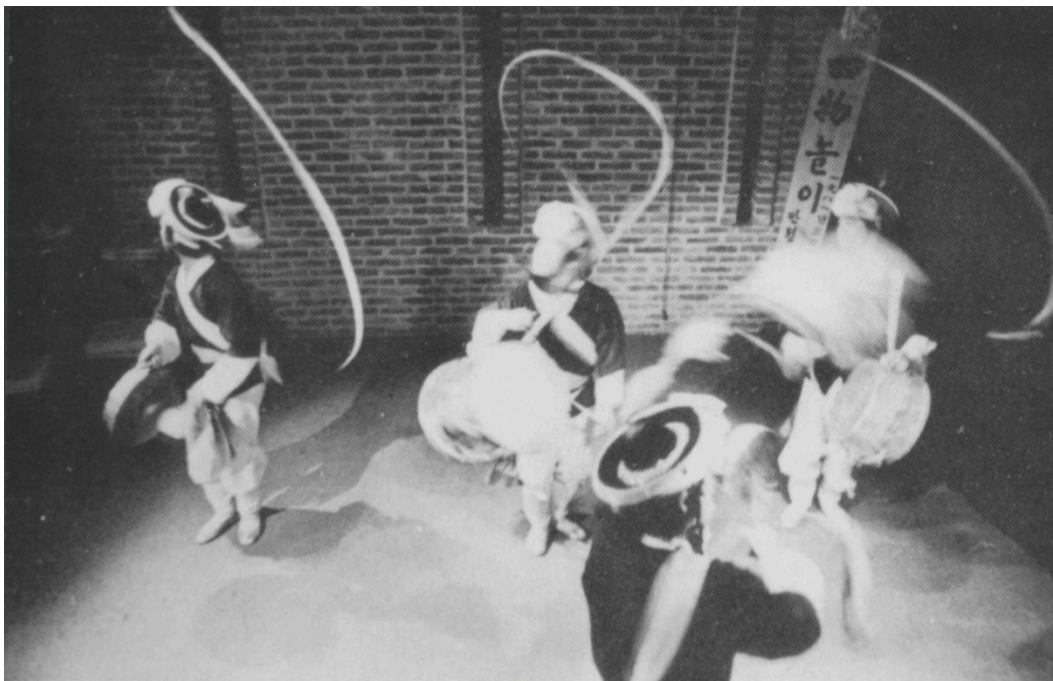


Figure 1.8. The SamulNori quartet performing *p'an kut* at the Space Theater, 1981. Photo courtesy of Sim Usöng.

Representing another “foreign” opinion of the budding quartet is Beate Gordon, former director of programming at the Asia Society. In an interview I conducted with Gordon at her New York apartment, she mentioned the course of events that led to her invite SamulNori in 1983 as part of an Asia Society

⁵⁹ Lee, “An Expatriate’s Life in Korea: A Profile of Suzanna Samstag Oh,” 37.

sponsored-tour. Gordon explained that she had only heard about the group indirectly, from a fellow presenter who had observed the quartet perform live. Since she was keen on bringing in talented performers from Asia for her series, she decided to take a chance. The risk proved to be one well-taken.

I thought they were superb. I think that their virtuosity, their technique was so thoroughly embedded. I mean, it was just unbelievably strong. You didn't really have to worry about them at all. . . . In German, one says, *er sitzt*, "it sits." It's in there, it's solid. And they had that.

They were very much the thing that I thought would communicate. And they had that *tsuchikusai* [土臭い, in Japanese, "rustic earthiness"] thing about them. And I thought that this would come through very strongly, and it did.

People were enraptured by them.⁶⁰

Gordon's sponsorship of SamulNori in 1983 under the auspices of the Asia Society tour stands as the singular launch pad for SamulNori's entrée into the "world music" scene in the 1980s. The tour also bore SamulNori's first internationally issued recording, *Samul-Nori: The Legendary Recording by Original Members in 1983* on the Nonesuch label.⁶¹

As evidenced by the sponsorship by powerful figures such as Kim Swoo Geun and Beate Gordon—impresarios both dedicated to the performing arts—auspicious encounters helped to facilitate and propel the SamulNori quartet's development and rise to fame from 1978 until 1993, when the quartet disbanded. Modeled after the same tenets of Kim Swoo Geun's Konggan project that aimed to reevaluate Korean culture and history in the face of modernization, the SamulNori quartet exercised an emphasis on the traditional and regional roots of their own musical research collaborations for a

⁶⁰ Beate Gordon, interview, November 23, 2010.

⁶¹ *Samul-Nori: The Legendary Recording by Original Members in 1983*. Nonesuch (1984).

changing, increasingly urban audience. It was in the culture of creativity fostered by the artistic community at the experimental Space Theater that they were given the creative license to embark on such an endeavor. In the process of researching the regional rhythms of *p'ungmul*, they ensured the likelihood that native Koreans would find familiar elements in the sounds of their compositions. But it was largely the “foreign” audience’s enthusiastic reception of their dynamic performances as a quartet (in the “classic” line-up of Kim Duk Soo, Kim Yong-bae, Lee Kwang Soo and Choi Jong-sil) that proved to be a key component in the launching of the quartet, and later, the genre.

CHAPTER TWO: THE DRUMMING OF DISSENT DURING SOUTH KOREA'S DEMOCRATIZATION MOVEMENT

민중문화의 꽃—풍물
P'ungmul—flower of the people's culture

—Minjung yesul wiwŏnhoe, 1985.¹

When the SamulNori quartet began touring widely on the world music circuit in the 1980s, the related genre of percussion music known as *p'ungmul* experienced a revival in South Korea. While through the quartet's success the music of *samulnori* became a symbol of Korean culture, it also became sonically linked (by association) with the sounds of protest. It was in fact the older genre from which *samulnori* derived—*p'ungmul*—that was appropriated and performed by student activists in the 1980s democratization movement. As the two genres were often indistinguishable to the uninitiated listener, confusion frequently ensued over the extra-musical associations of both percussion genres. In this chapter I examine how *p'ungmul* was politicized and performed in sites of protest in the mid- to late 1980s. I also put forth an integrated methodology for considering the importance of “sound evidence” in historical studies.²

¹ This is the simple title for an essay on *p'ungmul* in a text published by the Committee on *minjung* arts. Minjung yesul wiwŏnhoe, *Kŭrim kwa hamkke ponŭn uri sidae ŭi minjung yesul*, 72.

² This chapter is based on an article in the Spring/Summer 2012 issue of *Ethnomusicology*. See Lee, “The Drumming of Dissent.”

Excerpt 1³

With arms draped around the shoulders of their fellow laborers, the men walk in time to the faint beating of a drum. They are not marching per se, but rather, moving in step with intention. Their bodies are tightly linked and align in formations of five or more. Each man sports the identical button-down navy shirt-jackets which act more or less as the company's "uniform," along with blue jeans and sneakers. As a group, there is uniformity to their appearance; rows upon rows of these human chains are visible, as far as the lens can scan. They alternate with chants of "Oissa! Oissa!" giving an antiphonal ring to a vocable that is often grunted as a means to coordinate and focus energy in groups. Some men who are positioned at the far ends of the line take a clenched fist and gesture downwards with a swooping motion, emphatically punctuating the beat.

The footage shifts abruptly to a panoramic shot from a vantage point behind the procession. As the undulating mass of bodies moves forward to a destination yet unseen, rows of raven-haired heads appear to nod up and down. Off in the distance, a long banner heralds the gist of the event, but the camera angle prevents the viewer from discerning all of the text. One can only make out: "The deceased laborer Yi Sökkyu; Democracy." The flow of the mass adheres to the contours of the land. By the look of it, there are easily hundreds of men striding in solidarity. Their overall spirit appears less combative than it does resolute and resilient—even invigorated. The brassy sound of the small gong cuts through and rises above the commotion with its signature rhythmic pattern, both loud and commanding. It is to this steadfast and strong duple pulse that the mass follows. The gong is not seen, but heard.

³ I offer here a video transcript of select frames from the MBC documentary "1987nyön, 7.8.9 Nodongja taet'ujaeng: Yi Sökkyu ch'umosik" [1987 Laborers' struggle: the memorial ritual for Yi Sökkyu] I refer to this same documentary later in this chapter.

On August 22, 1987, during the height of the democratization movement in South Korea, a young laborer was struck and killed by an exploding tear gas canister used by riot police to quell a massive demonstration. Twenty-one-year old Yi Sökkyu was just one of two thousand employees at the Daewoo Shipbuilding Company on Köje Island who participated in a protest demanding labor reforms.⁴ Yi's tragic death sparked a national mourning and soon led to demonstrations throughout the country. In northern Seoul at the campus of Yonsei University, more than three thousand laborers and students gathered the following day to protest the wrongful death, chanting, "Destroy the military dictatorship that tramples on workers."⁵ A memorial service and demonstration for the fallen laborer took place on Köje Island on August 28.

Video footage archived by the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) documented some of the salient moments of this large-scale event, including a funerary procession for Yi.⁶ In the preceding excerpt I narrated my own transcript of the video's first few frames. In the video a small group of young adults clad in white attire can be seen at the head of the procession, playing Korean drums and gongs. The musicians play solemnly and with a touch of awkwardness, almost as if they are a bit overwhelmed by the entire occasion. Their position at the head of the line is significant as they lead, in ways both musical and ritual, the hundreds of laborers who gathered together to memorialize their fallen co-worker.

⁴ Anon., "Yi Sökkyu yölsa samangsö chagnye kkaji," 66.

⁵ Sherman, "Korean Workers Take Control of Factory," United Press International, 23 August 1987.

⁶ "1987nyön 7.8.9 Nodongja taet'ujaeng" [1987 Laborers' struggle], n.d. MBC Video.

SOUND EVIDENCE AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH

What might rustic drums and gongs have to do with labor protests or demonstrations against a dictatorial government in late twentieth-century Korea? In a period of South Korean history that is often referred to as the “great struggle for democracy,” the presence of a few drummers in a high-profile demonstration may seem anachronistic or even trivial. Yet during the 1980s, improvised explosives of Molotov cocktails were often accompanied by the sounds of drums and gongs on South Korean university campuses and on the streets.⁷ Anthropologist Chungmoo Choi noted that in the 1980s, “South Koreans became accustomed to loud percussion music as students danced to farmers’ music, dressed in traditional farmers’ white clothes, and battled with riot police.”⁸

Prior studies on resistance theater genres (*madanggŭk*) and the songs of protest (*minjung kayo*) in South Korea explain how the spirit of resistance was effectively channeled through both narrative and song. Historian Namhee Lee argued that *madanggŭk* was a type of social protest that gradually gave rise to “an alternative, even utopian, form of cultural and political expression” in the 1980s.⁹ Lee carefully historicized the use of *madanggŭk* by student activists as a type of ritual and as a performance of resistance. Through the analysis of *madanggŭk* scripts and performances, she examined how social and political commentary in the texts could be read—in transparent or more subtle ways.¹⁰ Scholar-critic Yi Yŏngmi, with her extensive insider knowledge of *madanggŭk* as it was practiced on the ground, organized a chronological overview of the resistance theater genre from the 1960s to the 1990s in *The*

⁷ See Tangherlini, “Shamans, Students, and the State,” 127; Sorensen, “Folk Religion and Political Commitment,” 325.

⁸ Choi, “The Minjung Culture Movement,” 108.

⁹ Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 187.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 207–208.

Principles and Characteristics of the Madanggük Form.¹¹ Similar to Namhee Lee, Yi engaged in close textual analysis of the theatrical plays.

Significant efforts have been made to transcribe, document, and organize the hundreds of protest songs that fall under the broad rubric of *minjung kayo* (literally, “songs of the people”). Beginning in 2006 the Korea Democracy Foundation began a collaborative project to publish notated songbooks of the *minjung kayo* that were popular from the 1970s to the 1980s.¹² Scholars such as Chŏng Kyŏngŭn and Yi Yŏngmi have also explored the range of songs (e.g. protest songs, work songs, campus folk songs, traditional Korean folk songs, and Korean rock ballads) that were infused with political or socially conscious lyrics.¹³ This broad vocal repertory came to be known as part of the “song movement” (*norae undong*) that was one branch of the populist culture movement that took place in the 1980s.¹⁴

While the study of resistance theater genres and the meticulous documentation of *minjung kayo* and protest songs have added important insights into the expressive culture of resistance in South Korea, the performances of *p’ungmul* at scenes of protest have been overlooked in historical studies of this period. I contend that this is directly related to the fact that *p’ungmul* is an instrumental music genre, unaccompanied by text. In the case of *minjung kayo*, lyrics can be read as a primary source, pliable to the tools of historical interpretation. The lyrics to an anthemic song of resistance such as Kim Minki’s

¹¹ Yi, *The Principles and Characteristics of the Madanggük Form*.

¹² As of 2012, the Korea Democracy Foundation has published three volumes of *minjung kayo* songbooks.

¹³ See Chŏng, *Han’guk hyŏndae minjung kayosa* [The History of Contemporary Korean Minjung Songs]; Yi, *Madanggük, riöllijŭm, minjokkük: Han’guk hyŏndae yŏn’guk undong ūi hŭrŭm kwa chaengchŏm* [Madanggük, Realism, Minjokkük: Contemporary Korean Resistance Theatre—Flow and Issues], *Han’guk taejung kayosa* [The History of Korean Popular Song], and *Madanggük yangsik ūi wŏnriwa tŭksŏng* [Principles and Characteristics of Madanggük Forms].

¹⁴ I refer here to the *minjung* cultural movement, a populist artistic and cultural movement that sought to express the ideals and issues encapsulated in the struggle for democracy. The concept of *minjung* is discussed later in this chapter.

“Morning Dew” (“Ach’im isŭl”), for instance, may be mined for political meanings that were resonant during a particular time period.

“Morning Dew”

After a long sleepless night,
leaf after leaf, is strewn
with drops of Morning Dew
that are more precious than pearls.
When the sorrows in my heart
begin to adhere, one by one,
I climb the hill in the morning
And learn to smile a little.
The sun ruddies the burial grounds
Afternoon heat, my trial.
I leave now
for the wilderness.
Leaving all my sorrows behind
I now depart.¹⁵

In her analysis of Kim’s “Morning Dew,” Chŏng Kyŏngŭn examined some of the benign lyrics that could be read as metaphors for Park Chung Hee’s oppressive government: “the *long night* and the time of torment, *heat and trials* [symbolized] oppression, and the *wilderness* could be read as sites of struggle in Kim’s critical and resistant songs, where he tried to overlay symbolically the sadness of those who had sacrificed their lives for the democratization movement.”¹⁶ The double meaning was not lost on government officials, who became aware of the song’s underlying symbolism. In 1975, construed as anti-government, the song was banned by the Park Chung Hee administration. Despite this ban, “Morning Dew” was still performed as a song of protest by student activists.

In a similar vein, scripted plays can be chipped away at to reveal embedded layers of sociopolitical commentary. In terms of historical analysis, however, music without text or notation is less

¹⁵ Translation by the author.

¹⁶ Chŏng, *Han’guk hyŏndae minjung kayosa*, 97; emphasis for *long night* is mine.

easily sourced and interpreted due to the absence of documentary or textual evidence. Moreover, its ephemeral quality in the course of performance resists the same kind of analytical treatment that text-based music elicits. Thus, despite the ubiquity of the sounds of *p'ungmul* at scenes of protest during South Korea's democratization movement, performances of instrumental music or music without text have largely remained unstudied as a form of resistance.¹⁷



Figure 2.1. A large-scale memorial protest held for Yi Sökkyu on Kōje Island.
© Korea Democracy Foundation.

¹⁷ To my knowledge, Suhong Ch'ae's monograph (2003, in Korean) on the use of *p'ungmul* during the labor movement is the only study devoted specifically to *p'ungmul*. Ch'ae's research focuses on the formation of South Korea's working class and considers the ways in which class consciousness and notions of group solidarity were cultivated through informal educational classes, including that of "*p'ungmul* education" (풍물 교육). My own inquiries into this area of research began with tracing the use of *p'ungmul* in protest during the 1980s student activist movement—which later became allied with the labor movement. By the early 1990s the learning of *p'ungmul* in labor unions and civic organizations had become commonplace. In many ways, I view the labor movement's use of *p'ungmul* as a logical extension to what had occurred during the student movement—a point that becomes clear in this chapter.

The video footage of Yi Sökkyu's memorial service asserts the unmistakable presence (both sonic and visual) of percussion music at this event.¹⁸ It was just one of many archival videos from this period of Korean history that I surveyed, where rallies and scenes of protest were often accompanied by the sounds of drumming.¹⁹ I also became attuned to the fact that the performance of *p'ungmul* was an act overheard but not always captured and framed in a visual medium by videographers. Thus with an ear to the pulse of dissent, I began to listen carefully for a kind of *sound evidence*—a sonic expression of resistance at scenes of protest.

Despite the epistemological challenges faced in “sourcing” these kinds of musical performances, I contend that ethnomusicological analytical methods and approaches can yield important new insights into historical research. Ethnomusicologists Regula Burckhardt Qureshi and Kay Kaufman Shelemay have previously addressed the challenges and potential rewards of grappling with musico-historical evidence, especially when dealing with oral histories and oral (musical) traditions. As documented in *A Song of Longing: An Ethiopian Journey*, Shelemay's unexpected findings in her post-fieldwork review of interview transcripts led to a new understanding of the religious history of the Beta Israel. By reexamining musical recordings and interviews, Shelemay discovered that prayers sung by one Beta Israel priest were in fact the core of a liturgical tradition that dated back to the fifteenth century. This musical evidence challenged prior assumptions that the “entire Falasha religious tradition and liturgy had been obtained directly from an external Jewish source and somehow preserved by the Beta Israel for

¹⁸ This video footage was obtained by request from MBC in Korea. Due to copyright issues, I am unable to upload the video onto a personal website for public viewing. To listen to the sounds of *p'ungmul* instruments, visit the Wesleyan Virtual Instrument Museum website (“Korea: drumming” section authored by Hae-Joo Kim). A YouTube search for “Korean drums and protest” also yields examples of *p'ungmul* used in recent demonstrations (e.g., WTO protest in Hong Kong, 2005).

¹⁹ “1987nyŏn 7.8.9 Nodongja taet’ujaeng” [1987 Laborers’ Struggle], n.d. MBC Video; “The Pacific Century: Fight for Democracy,” Pacific Basin Institute, Pomona College, 1992; “Yöksa dasi poki: 6 wöl minju hangjaeng” [Revisiting History: The June Democratic Uprising], MBC Video, 2003.

two thousand years.”²⁰

In an essay in the edited volume *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History*, Qureshi points out the issues she faced when conducting a historical study of Sufi music while contending with the “nonmusical parameters of historical inquiry.”²¹ Qureshi’s thought-provoking piece raises a number of pertinent questions regarding the nature of historical evidence, especially when dealing with oral histories and oral (musical) traditions. In this chapter I extend Qureshi’s discussion to include the oral traditions of *nontexted* musical genres, genres that prove even more elusive in their historicity.

The field of sound (or soundscape) studies also provides a rich conceptual space in which to interrogate the relevance of sound and aurality in culture. Steven Feld’s long-term commitment to considering “sound as a way of knowing” through his work on acoustemologies, for instance, paves the way for exploring local practices of listening.²² In a recent collaborative article entitled “Soundscapes: Towards a Sounded Anthropology,” the authors describe the numerous directions charted for soundscape studies, and call for “the potential of sounded aesthetics as ethnography...”²³ My research dovetails with some of these central concerns in soundscape studies, while also engaging more specifically with sonic issues in the study of history. In this chapter I challenge what is typically construed as primary source material in the study of a historical event by considering “sound evidence” and by amplifying the role of musical sound in a South Korean social movement.

²⁰ Shelemay, *A Song of Longing: An Ethiopian Journey*, 142.

²¹ Qureshi, “Sufi Music and the Historicity of Oral Tradition,” 103–104.

²² Feld, “Waterfalls of Song,” 97.

²³ Samuels, “Soundscapes: Towards a Sounded Anthropology,” 339–340.

P'UNGMUL: OBJECTS OF THE WIND

P'ungmul was once part of the social fabric of life when Korea was a pre-industrialized, agrarian society.²⁴ Traditionally performed by farmers and villagers, this percussion-based music and dance form served to distract farmers from the doldrums of arduous farming tasks and provided entertainment at gatherings and celebrations. *P'ungmul* has also played an integral role in ritually marking the passing of seasons within an agricultural cycle. Events such as the first full moon of the Lunar New Year (Chöngwöl Taeborüm) and the Harvest Moon Festival continue to be important occasions that feature either large-scale or extended performances of *p'ungmul* in villages or other outdoor settings.



Figure 2.2. The Imsil P'ilbong Nongak Preservation Society performs *p'ungmul*. Photograph by author.

Far from being monolithic, *p'ungmul* features many regional and local variants in terms of rhythm, performance style and roles, instrumentation, and attire. Five broad regional styles are typically distinguished for *p'ungmul*—Uttari (composed of the Kyönggi and Ch'ungch'öng provinces), Yöngdong (Kangwön province), Honam udo (western half of the Chölla province), Honam chwado

²⁴ In this case, “Korea” refers to a pre-modern unified Korea, prior to the division of the peninsula and the formation of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in 1948.

(eastern half of the Chŏlla province), and Yŏngnam (Kyŏngsang provinces).²⁵ Within these regions, many local variants exist. Although its performance contexts have changed drastically since the latter half of the twentieth century—once South Korea transformed from an agricultural to industrialized economy—*p'ungmul* has maintained a strong association with village life and Korea's agrarian roots. In more recent times, *p'ungmul* has shifted from being a strictly rural musical tradition to a genre that is performed by professional and amateur musicians, cultural preservationist troupes, and even drumming ensembles outside Korea.²⁶

Although *p'ungmul* is generally accepted as one of Korea's oldest surviving folk musical traditions, its precise origins on the Korean peninsula are nonetheless uncertain and a source of speculation. Nathan Hesselink has reflected on the debates and the challenges with locating the term *p'ungmul* in the historical record.²⁷ He describes the somewhat facile link often made by scholars regarding the third-century *Sanguo zhi* text (*History of the Three Kingdoms*) as the first documented reference to *p'ungmul* in Korea. Since no mention of percussion instruments or of the term *p'ungmul* appears in the text, Hesselink questions the impulse that both scholars and *p'ungmul* practitioners have had with imbuing the genre with historical antiquity.²⁸ Further terminological complications arise with the usage of the word *nongak* (literally, “farming music”), which describes the same genre. *Nongak*, however, now carries with it the weight of contemporary debates that summon both a post-colonial critique of Japan's occupation of the Korean peninsula (1910–45) and the pointed assertion that Japanese authorities and

²⁵ Lee, *Minsok, munhwa, kŭrigo ūmak*, 213–14. See Figure 1.4.

²⁶ For a comprehensive overview and analysis of *p'ungmul* in both traditional and more contemporary contexts, see Nathan Hesselink's 2006 monograph *P'ungmul: South Korean Drumming and Dance*.

²⁷ Hesselink, *P'ungmul*, 13–17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

scholars used the word as a way to restrict the scope of this activity to that of farmers and their music. In short, the term *nongak* still elicits a charged reaction from some Korean music scholars and practitioners, and therefore *p'ungmul*—a term more benign, more inclusive, but less concrete in its specificity—is commonly used today.

Deriving its etymological meaning from a composite of two Sino-Korean terms, the word *p'ungmul* (풍물) translates literally into “wind objects.”²⁹ When the source words are used together, however, the compound word is generally understood as a type of “percussion band” that typically performs loud, spirited music and dance outdoors in expansive areas. Although there is typically at least one wind instrument employed in the ensemble, *p'ungmul* is best identified by its use of a set of four percussion instruments, as in a *samulnori* ensemble: *puk* (barrel drum), *changgo* (hourglass drum), and two gongs—one large and one small, called the *ching* and the *kkwaenggwari*.



Figure 2.3. The four main percussion instruments used in *p'ungmul*, P'ilbong village, Imsil county. Photographs by author.

A small handheld drum called the *sogo* and a double-reed shawm known as the *hojök* are also typically

²⁹ The word *p'ungmul* is composed of the Chinese cognates “*pung*” (풍/風 - “wind”) and “*mul*” (물/物 - “objects” or “things”). The word *nongak* is a combination of the Sino-Korean cognates “*nong*” (농/農 - “farming”) and “*ak*” (악/樂 - “music”).

played in a *p'ungmul* ensemble. The *hojök* (also called the *t'aepy'öngso*) is the primary melodic instrument and is known for its distinctive nasal and piercing sound. Less frequently used is the *nabal*, a long, straight trumpet. All instruments are either handheld or fastened by long sashes around the performer's body, in order to allow for movement during the course of performance. Dance and mobility are central to this genre, and therefore a large open space is the ideal site for a *p'ungmul* performance.

In most forms of *p'ungmul* a limited number of character actors known as *chapsaek* (literally, “various colors”) dress as stock figures from Korean society. This motley crew of societal archetypes—such as the *yangban* (learned aristocrat), *chorijung* (Buddhist monk), and *halmi* (grandmother)—serve to add comic relief, encourage audience participation, and administer to the overall festive mood of a *p'ungmul* performance. This is achieved through the performance of stylized dance gestures, animated facial expressions, commentary that borders on lewd or absurd, and the physical exaggeration of the stock figure's stereotypic image or defining characteristics (e.g., the *halmi* is usually played hunched over, using a walking cane as a prop). The *chapsaek* also heed the various choreographies in which the *p'ungmul* performers engage, keeping the alignment of ground formations (*chinbop*) in check.



Figure 2.4. Chapsaek characters in costume during an Imsil P'ilbong performance. Photographs by author.

Donna Kwon conducted her dissertation field research in the North Chōlla province of Korea, focusing on the *p'ungmul* style practiced in the village of P'ilbong, Imsil county. In describing the soundscape of a typical *p'ungmul* performance, Kwon eloquently evoked the complex palette of sonic textures that one hears.

When the whole ensemble is playing the overall sound is full and loud but with a balanced percussive texture. Each instrument group adds their own necessary color to the overall sound. The small gongs clang with a high, shimmery sonority, while the larger gongs ring with a low, continuous “wah-like” sound that really fills out the lower frequency spectrum. . . . The *puk* provides a very discernible bass in accenting the strong beats of the rhythms while the *changgo* fills the space in between. The distinctive high and nasal timbre of the *t'aep'yōngso* (conical double reed) adds a great deal of improvisatory melodic interest with its unique style of ornamentation, heavy vibrato and bending inflections. The *t'aep'yōngso* runs pretty continuously but has the freedom to come in and out where appropriate.³⁰

Kwon's description gives a sense of the richness of timbral variety in this percussion genre. It also cues the reader in to the fact that the simultaneous sounding of all instruments is a loud affair, most

³⁰ Kwon, “Music, Movement, and Space,” 132.

naturally suited for outdoor performance. Anyone who has experienced a *p'ungmul* performance first-hand is unlikely to forget the high decibel level generated by a large-scale ensemble. Moreover, the sounds of the four percussion instruments played in concert have audible resonances that can carry over long distances. These qualities factored into the appeal of *p'ungmul* at scenes of protest.

In this chapter, *p'ungmul* thus refers to two things: (1) the genre of percussion music and dance traditionally performed by farmers in Korea's once agrarian-based society, and (2) based on the former definition, the instruments and music picked up for use by university students during South Korea's democratization movement in the 1980s. Since there is a growing body of scholarly literature in English on *p'ungmul* in historical, contemporary, and even Korean American contexts, I focus my attention on the use of *p'ungmul* in protest.³¹ I move now to contextualizing the appeal of *p'ungmul* during an era of authoritarianism and growing discontent.

RESISTANCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

In South Korea, the acting governments of Park Chung Hee (Pak Chŏnghŭi, 1961–79) and Chun Doo Hwan (Chŏn Tuhwan, 1980–88) were characterized by authoritarianism, the implementation of sweeping economic reforms that pushed the country to export-led industrialization, and the suppression of speech and human rights. During this tenure of consecutive military rule in the Republic of Korea, university students were often the first to voice dissent against the ruling government. Although student-led resistance movements served as a strong counterpoint to the state in modern Korean history, it was during the second half of the Park regime that a counterculture of opposition to the state began to

³¹ On Korean American contexts see Park, "Negotiating Identities in a Performance Genre"; Kwon, "Music, Movement and Space"; Hesselink, *P'ungmul*; and Kim, "Diasporic *P'ungmul* in the United States."

emerge with force.³²

Key events during Park's rule that incited student resistance included the Japan Normalization treaty of 1965 and his establishment of the Yusin Constitution in November 1972.³³ In a strategy to gain unrestricted power, Park implemented the Yusin Constitution as a way to negate the legitimacy of Parliament and remove any limits imposed on his presidential term. His declaration of the Emergency Decree Number Nine in 1975 also made illegal any criticism of Park or the military government. Namhee Lee notes that in this period, "any gesture of opposition or resistance was indiscriminately punished with dismissal or suspension from school—or imprisonment."³⁴ Faced with strict military repression, student activists began to employ various tactics in their acts of opposition post-1975, from organizing campus clubs as hubs for political activity to staging subversive plays and initiating street demonstrations.

The watershed moment during the era of military regimes was President Chun Doo Hwan's declaration of martial law on May 17, 1980, an act designed to solidify his legitimacy and suppress student demonstrations that had flared up across the country a few weeks prior to when he assumed control of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA).³⁵ The following day a demonstration that began in the streets of Kwangju led to the murders of unarmed citizens by Chun's military police. The people of Kwangju and student activists rose in defiance of the military police and briefly regained

³² Eckert et al., *Korea Old and New*, 368.

³³ Ibid., 365–68.

³⁴ Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 174.

³⁵ After the assassination of Park Chung Hee on October 26, Prime Minister Choi Kyu Hah [Choe Kyuha] assumed presidency in the Fourth Republic of Korea (1979–80). This was short-lived, however, as Chun Doo Hwan assumed control of the Korean military in a bloodless coup d'état in December 1979.

control of the city for a few days.³⁶ The insurrection continued until Chun ordered military troops to enter the city and reestablish military law on May 27. The brutality of the measures employed in Kwangju incurred the loss of hundreds of lives, and the events were seared into the consciousness of citizens across the country.³⁷

In the aftermath of the Kwangju Uprising (May 1980), South Korean university students took their protests to heightened levels of organization, amplitude, and resistance during the 1980s. Student-led movements began to forge strong alliances with labor unions and other sectors of Korean society. Some activist student groups volunteered their time at factories and participated in “night sessions” that were fronts for discussions on ideology.³⁸ By June 1987 a nationwide movement for democratization had ensued. Student activists were joined by labor activists and later the general populace. Massive street demonstrations and fierce opposition against the Chun Doo Hwan regime culminated in a deafening dissonance that ultimately led to the first democratic elections at the close of 1987—several months before South Korea hosted the 1988 Summer Olympics. While demonstrations were to continue throughout the latter 1980s, 1987 in particular marked a significant year in the history of resistance movements in Korea.

³⁶ Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 44.

³⁷ The number of civilians killed during the Kwangju Uprising remains disputed. As Namhee Lee notes, the official number given by the Korean government is 191. Based on the Law to Compensate Persons Involved in the Kwangju Democratic Movement, however the number of applications for dead and missing persons numbers over 600 (Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 46).

³⁸ In her research on the alliance between student and labor activists, Namhee Lee describes how student activists sometimes forged their identities in order to gain employment at factories: “In that decade, thousands of university students and intellectuals plunged into the world of the factory worker, forgoing university diplomas, job prospects, and middle-class lives in the hope of bringing about ‘revolution’” (Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 214).



Figure 2.5. Front page of the “Kwanak Political Agitation School” pamphlet.
©Seoul National University Archives.

POLITICIZING P’UNGMUL

What was once a musical genre typically associated with village rituals and festive gatherings then became inscribed with political meaning. The concept of *minjung* is a formative part of this discussion, and the student resistance movements of the 1970s and 1980s were inextricably linked with this idea. Commonly rendered in English as “the masses” or “the people,” *minjung* is a flexible concept that can connote a range of meanings contingent upon its interpretive framework.³⁹ Anthropologist Nancy Abelmann, who researched the Koch’ang Tenant Farmers’ Movement in the mid 1980s, argued that the trope of *minjung* served as “both a political prism and the regnant narrative of dissent.”⁴⁰ Although *minjung* had existed as a term of discourse since at least the nineteenth century, it was during the 1970s and 1980s that the term acquired politicized meanings and entered into contemporary parlance and praxis.⁴¹

³⁹ The Sino-Korean characters break down as people (*min*, 民) and crowd (*chung*, 衆).

⁴⁰ Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Echoes of Dissent*, 7.

⁴¹ Kang, “Chinbojök minjok,” 46–47.

In their studies on Korean social movements, Abelman and Namhee Lee both speak to how reworked conceptualizations of *minjung* invoked memories, histories, and historiographies. Resistance movements such as the Tonghak Peasants Rebellion of 1894 and the March 1 Independence Movement of 1919 (during the Japanese colonial period), for instance, were reexamined by *minjung* adherents and defined as pivotal moments in reinscribed historiographies. With memories of the distant past applied to the *minjung* narratives of dissent, new protagonists began to emerge in the drama—the downtrodden masses of Korea’s fraught history.⁴² In the new narratives, students imagined the oppressed as the “subjects of history” who were situated in opposition to various oppressors. And in the new narratives, students themselves took on the role of the oppressed. This was both a discursive and a performative strategy. As a conceptual tool, *minjung* also served as a unifying force. Abelman states that “in the South Korean community of dissent, memory was imagined as a personal resource or collective repository that could mobilize people.”⁴³

Excerpt 2

The video cuts to the very front of the procession, where the student musicians can now be seen as well as heard. This is twenty-one seconds into the footage. The musicians, who look to be in their early twenties, wear the white garments that once clothed the agrarian laborers and commoners in Korea’s not-too-distant past. Their loose-fitting pants cinch at the ankles, while the wide-sleeved, open jackets tie together at the front with long sashes. The white contrasts with the dark hues of the blue-collared jackets. As I reviewed this archival footage over and over again, however, I was conscious of at least one anachronism in this farmer façade: white sneakers.

⁴² Wells, “The Cultural Construction of History,” 12.

⁴³ Abelman, *Echoes of the Past, Echoes of Dissent*, 21.

We first glimpse the back of the small gong player, who is playing while walking backwards. He faces the other musicians and the crowd of protesters directly, because he is in essence the musical leader for this event. For a split second, it appears that he is headed in the wrong direction, but one of the Daewoo laborers grabs his arm and directs him toward the intended route. Immediately following suit are the ching and changgo players. The large gong player is the lone female in the group. Her arm has sunk with the weight of the heavy gong; she can barely muster enough strength to raise and strike it with the large padded mallet in her right hand. Behind her, the first hourglass drum player is perhaps the most animated of the bunch. He plays the “Töng, tta kung tta; Töng, tta kung tta” segment of the rhythmic cycle with a bounce to his step. A second changgo player passes quickly by the camera lens, patting the right drum head with the palm of his hand. The last musician to pass is the barrel drum player. With a drum attached to a sash that is loosely slung around his shoulder, he plays beats that synchronize naturally with those heard on the hourglass drums. The musicians who drum seem earnest, but not entirely at ease with their musical gestures.

PERFORMING MINJUNG: INVOKE THE FOLK

One way of enabling the *minjung* ethos was to perform it. This was done by embracing the performative traditions of the “common people” of Korean history. Folk culture (*minsok munhwa*) had a cachet in what has been called the *minjung* cultural movement—the artistic offshoot of the “peoples’ movement.” By reviving folk traditions that were associated with the peasants and the farmers, student activists invoked history and the *minjung* concept. In her research on the *minjung* cultural movement, Namhee Lee explores how folk research clubs first developed on university campuses in the 1960s as a way to recover folk traditions that were ostensibly in danger of being forgotten in the wake of South

Korea's period of industrialization and increasing Westernization.⁴⁴ By the 1970s *madanggŭk* had become popular on university campuses as a resistance theater genre that drew its inspiration from the traditional styles of masked dance dramas known as *t'alch'um*.⁴⁵

Vocal traditions such as *p'ansori* (epic storytelling through song), and *minyo* (folk songs), and the percussion genre of *p'ungmul* also began to be thought of as emblematic of the "folk."⁴⁶ As the representative musical genre of the farmers, however, *p'ungmul* aligned particularly well with the protagonists of a *minjung*-centered historiography. Unlike the genres of *t'alch'um* and *p'ansori*, which required years of intensive training in either dance or singing, the learning of *p'ungmul* was more accessible to novices first becoming acquainted with Korean folk music. The growing popularity of the related *samulnori* genre and the advent of *samulnori* notation also facilitated the learning of fundamental rhythmic patterns that were shared between the two genres.⁴⁷ But as a more recent arrival on the Korean music scene, the genre of *samulnori* itself seemed to elicit antagonism from those students who were most invested in learning *p'ungmul*. *Samulnori* was, in effect, too recent an invention to ring true as an authentic musical marker of Korea's past. Korean music scholar Keith Howard noted that some "student [*p'ungmul*] groups have even refused to learn from or play with Kim [Duk Soo]'s team"—thereby distancing themselves from the increasingly popular *samulnori* genre.⁴⁸ On a conceptual level, it was the

⁴⁴ Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 191.

⁴⁵ During the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910), *t'alch'um* served not only as entertainment but also functioned as an outlet for social satire or critique. In Chosŏn's highly stratified society that clearly delineated between the upper ruling class (*yangban*) and the lower three classes, *t'alch'um* performers were able to work in critical social commentary through either stylized or comical modes of delivery.

⁴⁶ Anon., "Minjung munhwanŭn marhanda," 7–10; Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 191.

⁴⁷ See chapter 3: Inscribing Difference through Two Related Percussion Genres.

⁴⁸ Howard, "Samul Nori: A Re-interpretation," 542.

historical authenticity of *p'ungmul* that was appealing—thus activating a particular set of values that became important in the performance of resistance.

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

The term *kongdongch'e* or “community” became an all-important mantra in the discourse surrounding *p'ungmul* and the *minjung* cultural movement. The concept of *kongdongch'e* (공동체/共同體) was believed to be intimately connected to the collective labor unit (*ture*) that existed in Korea's traditional agricultural society. The *ture* was a village organization to which males belonged, and they carried out agricultural work on irrigated farms “by means of ‘mutual help,’ in solidarity as a community.”⁴⁹ The *ture* served several important social functions: (1) creating a training ground for a cooperative life based on agriculture, (2) heightening the efficiency of labor, (3) serving as a site for mutual assistance, (4) fostering community spirit, and (5) combining collective labor with group entertainment.⁵⁰ Each *ture* had a set of *p'ungmul* instruments, which would be played in order to increase work efficiency as well as for general entertainment. In the minds of the university students who held a romanticized view of folk culture, *p'ungmul* represented and fulfilled the ethos of the farmers and their communal lifestyle.⁵¹ The concepts of the “collective” and “community,” much like the trope of *minjung*, became attractive ones for students to ascribe meaning to in their search for authentic symbols from folk culture.

Scholar and activist Ch'ae Hŭiwan surveyed several written accounts by students who were

⁴⁹ Shin, “Social History of *Ture* Community,” pt. 1, 4.

⁵⁰ Shin, “Social History of *Ture* Community,” pt. 2, 10–11.

⁵¹ Haetsal, “Olbarŭn norimunhwa ŭi kŏnsŏl ŭl wihayŏ,” 91.

involved with the *minjung* cultural movement during the 1970s. One student's entry is telling:

By playing *p'ungmul* and learning the movements and the rhythms of our nation,
our people, and our farmers, we become them. Or rather, we find ourselves.
Through the blood of our ancestors embodied within us, natural body movements
and instinctive rhythms are expressed. It is most natural, and it must be so because it
is not artificial, not foreign, but our own beats and our own drumming
(Ewha Womans University Folk Festival, May 1976).⁵²

Another student in the Seoul National University Agricultural College *p'ungmul* group expressed the need to develop “historical consciousness to understand properly and feel the elements that existed in the lives of our ancestors.”⁵³ Playing *p'ungmul* thus became a means of performing *minjung*. In other words, the connection to *minjung*'s subjects of history—the farmers—were enacted through the performance of their music. The unattributed voices in Ch'ae's transcripts tell of the sentiments that *p'ungmul* aroused, ranging from the emotional and filial to the more explicitly political.

One challenge presented itself in this strategy to “invoke the folk,” however. Before the students could connect with the “masses” and their music, they first had to learn the basic rhythms and playing styles of *p'ungmul*. As many of the student activists did not come from families who tilled the land or who were steeped in knowledge of Korean music genres, drumming associated with Korea's rural past was certainly not a tradition with which they were familiar. Thus, as mentioned, folklore research clubs developed on university campuses during the 1970s and served as important sites for research, learning, and transmission.⁵⁴

The use of informal notation often served as an aid to learning and acquisition. As an oral tradition, *p'ungmul* did not have an accompanying body of written notation that newcomers could draw

⁵² Ch'ae, “70-yöndae üi munhwa undong,” 173.

⁵³ Ibid., 181.

⁵⁴ Lee, “Making Minjung Subjectivity,” 563.

upon when first learning basic rhythms. The standard mode for learning *p'ungmul* required the recitation of drumming syllables or non-lexical vocables (*ip changdan* or *kuüm*) while practicing techniques for striking the drum (usually the *changgo* hourglass drum). Yet for some, the simple jotting down of syllables helped in the conceptualization and retention of the rhythmic patterns. These memory aids were often circulated in campus clubs and distributed to beginners.

Figure 2.6. “Basic Rhythms”—drum syllables rendered in *han’gŭl*. © Seoul National University Archives.

⁵⁵ MeSook Ko attended one of these retreats in 1986. In a conversation I had with Ko on November 25, 2006, she recounted to me that the brief excursion was well organized and that the group traveled by bus from village to village in the Ch'olla province of Korea. The students learned the basic rhythmic patterns from appointed "teachers." Reflecting upon the experience, Ko expressed some ambivalence over the extractive quality of the learning process and wondered if the students truly assisted the villagers or temporarily took the farmers away from their duties.



Figure 2.7. Plain-clothes police officers hauling off a student who participated in a demonstration in Seoul on August 15, 1988. © The Hankyoreh.

P'UNGMUL, POLITICS, AND PROTEST

How did this politicized *p'ungmul* become linked with protest, then? Unlike the resistance theatre plays that enacted historical narratives of dissent or featured scripts that commented directly or indirectly on the Chun Doo Hwan government, aspects of dissent are harder to read between *p'ungmul* and protest. In this section I combine analyses of a variety of source material—newspaper articles, underground publications, photographs, and audiovisual footage from the period—to consider how *p'ungmul* became incorporated into scenes of protest during the democratization movement.⁵⁶

By the mid-1980s, student-led street demonstrations had become a common occurrence on

⁵⁶ One of the sources I methodically surveyed was the unregistered periodical *Mal* (translated as “words” or “speech”), housed at the Harvard-Yenching Library. Published by a group of dissident journalists who formed the Council for Democratic Press Movement (CDPM) civic group in December 1984, *Mal* was a covert operation that took an anti-government stance and featured critical, investigative reporting. According to a report published by the Asia Watch Committee in 1988, “Mai [sic] was the target of constant government harassment, including police raids of the CDPM offices, confiscation of the organizations files, and the frequent detention of its editors on charges of ‘spreading false rumors’” (Asia Watch Committee, *Freedom of Expression*, 48-51).

campuses. This generation of university students, later dubbed by the press as the “386 generation,” came to be known more for their activities outside than inside the classroom.⁵⁷ Because of the constant disruptions posed by demonstrations or the tear gas used by riot police to disperse protesters on campuses, instructors were often forced to cancel or suspend classes on a moment’s notice. Under heavy censorship at the time, South Korean news outlets were not at liberty to report extensively on the details of student protests or demonstrations against the Chun Doo Hwan government. Rather, it was the foreign press that provided a snapshot of the prevailing soundscape of dissidence. Wire transcripts from the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) during the tumultuous year of 1987 included frequent reports of students “banging drums and gongs” while participating in street demonstrations. Often, as in this example, simple but incendiary slogans accompanied the rhythms played on drums:

Waves of students beating drums and shouting "Revolution!" pelted riot police with bricks and firebombs in Seoul and other cities Tuesday, the seventh day of violent anti-government protest. Growing numbers of people showed support for the protesters, booing the outnumbered police and sometimes joining in the attacks.⁵⁸

A few weeks earlier, United Press International had reported:

The head of South Korea's largest opposition party called on President Chun Doo Hwan today to take responsibility for a cover-up of the police torture-killing of a student activist and resign along with his entire Cabinet. Meanwhile, 200 Buddhist students in flowing blue robes confronted 100 riot police in front of their school, chanting "down with the dictatorship" to the beat of a ritual drum.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ The “386 generation” refers to people born in the 1960s who attended university during the 1980s and were in their 30s during the 1990s.

⁵⁸ Renfrew, “Students Battle Riot Police in Week-Old Street Violence,” Associated Press, June 16, 1987.

⁵⁹ Sherman, “Opposition Leader Calls for President to Resign,” United Press International, May 25, 1987.

The AP and UPI reports and supporting audiovisual materials from the period serve to illustrate the conflation of *p'ungmul* drumming with dissident acts of political confrontation.⁶⁰ While these examples from Western news agencies evidence the presence of drumming at scenes of protest, the reports nevertheless remain somewhat one-dimensional on their own. For this reason, I now introduce three excerpted accounts from archival and ethnographic research that give the news briefs more definition to. Each example illustrates the politicization of *p'ungmul* and concomitantly introduces the contributions that interdisciplinary modes of analysis can bear on historical research.⁶¹

To look first at archival findings: ethnomusicologist Marnie Dilling is best remembered for her pioneering work on the role that music played in the elaborate productions of the Seoul 1988 Olympic Ceremonies.⁶² It is perhaps less well known, however, that Dilling also conducted extensive field research on college *p'ungmul* groups in Korea in the mid- to late 1980s.⁶³ Her entire collection of research materials is housed at the University of California at Berkeley's Jean Gray Hargrove Music Library. Although Dilling never formally published on the topic of music and protest, her interviews with

⁶⁰ See "1987nyŏn 7.8.9 Nodongja taet'ujaeng"; "The Pacific Century"; *Yŏksa dasi poki*, 6.

⁶¹ I began researching this topic in 2006 during a *Music Stories inside and Politics* seminar taught by Anne Shreffler at Harvard University. This research has benefited from a long gestation period, in which twists and turns of new findings in archival research have intersected with serendipitous encounters in the field.

⁶² See Dilling, *Stories inside Stories*.

⁶³ In her foreword to Dilling's book (published posthumously), Bonnie Wade mentions that Dilling conducted research on the Korean student cultural movement on five university campuses in 1988–89 (Dilling, *Stories inside Stories*, viii). In an earlier version of this chapter, I noted that Dilling had worked with four student *p'ungmul* groups, based on her comments from an audio interview she conducted with the president of the Ewha Womans University culture division (Dilling, "Music of Prayer and Protest"). In the interview Dilling mentions her work with four student groups. The five groups with which she eventually came to work were based at Korea University, Yonsei University, Seoul National University, Sogang University, and Ewha Womans University.

former student activists and video footage from protests are a rich primary resource for analysis.⁶⁴

Dilling's interview with the *sangsoe* (the small gong player or musical leader) of the Korea University *p'ungmul* group, for instance, brings into relief some of the students' underlying motivations for selecting *p'ungmul* as a rallying force in protests: "We don't just play Poongmoor [sp] but [are] using Poongmoor as a tool to let the society know of all the discrepancies, to be able to fix some of the wrong existence of our society. In other words as a method for [the] student movement . . . when there are a lot of people [we] try to concentrate the will of the people and be able to show power." The interviewee goes on to say that the music of *p'ungmul* is appealing on an aesthetic level but can be used as an effective vehicle to "reflect and hold our ideology and practicing content."⁶⁵

Oral histories constituted a second useful avenue. The not too distant past of the 1980s allows for the possibility of directly engaging with student activists who participated in the democratization movement. For my second example I turn to an interview I conducted with the musician Kim Dong-won that brings us back to the opening vignette and to the year 1987.⁶⁶ Kim was a former member of a Korean music study group active in political protests, and he was one of the many participants in the Seoul-based memorial services for the aforementioned Yi Sökkyu. After news of Yi Sökkyu's death spread, Kim was asked to play the small gong at a memorial protest near the Yöngdöngp'o train station

⁶⁴ At the Society of Ethnomusicology national meeting in 1987 (Ann Arbor, MI), Dilling delivered the paper "Music of Prayer and Protest: Korean Traditional Music in Christian Ritual and Student Demonstrations, June 1986–June 1987." The unpublished paper—which is in the Margaret Walker Dilling Collection at Berkeley—focused on the use of Korean folk music for "political, social, and cultural advocacy" in prayer services and demonstrations (Dilling, "Music of Prayer and Protest," 1).

⁶⁵ Korea University Nongaktae, Soe: Yongdök Park, transcribed interview, May 22, 1989, p. 6, in folder VI-3, Margaret Walker Dilling Collection, University of California, Berkeley.

⁶⁶ Kim Dong-won's trajectory from a former student activist (performing *p'ungmul*) to the educational director at SamulNori Hanullim demonstrates how the two musical genres were more connected than mutually exclusive.

in Seoul.⁶⁷ But before he could actually play, he was apprehended by police and imprisoned for three months. The incriminating evidence was the small gong found in Kim's bag. The account demonstrates, in a powerful way, the extent to which *p'ungmul* and protest had become so intertwined that even the mere sight of a small gong instigated the following series of events:

So I told them that I came to play for the memorial service for the worker who died so pitifully. I came to provide musical accompaniment. . . .
Oh, so this is one of the bad ones. And then I got beat up pretty badly. . . .
Yes, of course this was. So, there was a direct reason for how I ended up there in the first place. They would ask me who was involved, who was involved, while they dealt blows.⁶⁸

My final account is derived from feedback and is therefore prefaced with some anecdotal information coming from my field research period in South Korea from 2008 to 2009. In a strange and wonderful twist of fate in December 2008, I ended up one evening at the sixtieth birthday celebration for the scholar-activist Ch'ae Hŭiwan (mentioned earlier in the chapter). I had turned to Ch'ae's influential writings on *minjung* theory and masked dance dramas early on in the research process and was delighted at the opportunity to meet him. In the dark and smoky bar were many of the luminaries of the masked dance and *madanggŭk* resistance movements of the 1970s.

I was seated across from a gentleman named Lee Soobeen [Yi Subin], who was curious to learn how a Korean American female, much younger than most of the attendees, had ended up at this gathering. I described how one of my mentors Choi Haeree [Ch'oe Haeri]—a researcher of Korean

⁶⁷ A special report by Susan Chira, "Koreans Fail to Make Martyr of Worker," appeared in the *New York Times* on August 28, 1987. Chira reported on the protest that occurred in Seoul: "More than 3,000 student protesters battled the police in several sections of Yŏngdŭngpo with what have become similar cat-and-mouse tactics. As rows of riot policemen stood at the ready, small groups of students darted down an alley, tossed rocks or Molotov cocktails at policemen, and ran away in an attempt to draw the policemen in. . . . The police led away more than 100 protesters."

⁶⁸ Kim, Dong-won, telephone interview, November 30, 2006.

dance who had worked and studied under Ch'ae—had invited me to the party without fully realizing the intimate nature of the occasion. Although we both felt out of place, Lee took it upon himself to make us feel comfortable and, in typical Korean fashion, began asking inquisitively about my background and my research interests in music and protest.

During the course of our conversation that evening I discovered that he had been active in the masked dance (*t'alp'ae*) and *p'ungmul* group at Pusan National University in the mid-1980s. He casually mentioned that he had once participated in a protest on Kōje Island. I was immediately intrigued and asked him to elaborate. Lee was surprised to learn that I even knew of the protest and that I was able to recount aspects of the event in great detail. I told him I had been studying a piece of archival footage from the protest on Kōje Island, showing a group of young people playing *p'ungmul* instruments at the front of the procession. Might he actually have participated in a memorial protest for Yi Sōkkyu on Kōje Island in late August 1987? My impressions of the youthful drummer from the video did not align with the image of the person sitting before me.

Having never seen or heard of the video, however, Lee was unable to verify his appearance on the video at that point in time. A few weeks after our initial meeting, he was kind enough to grant me an interview. As it turned out, he was indeed one of the drummers at the protest—as he confirmed when I showed him the footage shot by the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation. The second time we met for an interview, he provided first-hand commentary on the video as we watched it frame-by-frame. His perspective was invaluable and clarifying.

According to Lee, he and his fellow drummers were based in Pusan when they received word from a citizens' activism league on Kōje Island that there was to be a memorial protest for a laborer who had died during a demonstration. Pusan being the closest major city to Kōje Island, the request for *p'ungmul* performers was sent there—about a fifty-minute boat ride from the island. Two excerpts from the

interview follow:

And to the right of the Daewoo hospital you can see the funerary altar area. And there was a stage. Yes, a stage. We would hold events there and play *p'ungmul* there. People would deliver speeches there or we would play. . . . Inside of the hospital they were negotiating with the surviving members of the family—how the funeral proceedings were to take place and what sort of compensation the family would receive [from Daewoo]. One of the chief attorneys negotiating for the case was the former president Roh Moo-hyun, along with another attorney I can't recall the name of.⁶⁹ . . . While the negotiations were going on inside, people would gather in the front of the hospital and wait.⁷⁰



Figure 2.8. The group of students from Pusan play in front of the funerary altar for the deceased Yi Sökkyu.⁷¹ Soobeen Lee is seated second from the left, playing the hourglass drum. © Korea Democracy Foundation.

⁶⁹ Review of *Mal* revealed that the other attorney with Roh was Yi Sangsu (Anon., “Yi Sökkyu yölsa samangsö changnye kkaji,” 67).

⁷⁰ Lee Soobeen, interview, May 12, 2009.

⁷¹ This photograph clearly documents the fact that even the most ardent practitioners of *p'ungmul* also played in the seated, *samulnori* style. (The *ching* or large gong player stands, however. This is likely due to the absence of a *ching* wooden frame or stand.) In my interview with Lee, he admitted that he often listened to cassette recordings by the SamulNori quartet as a way to learn rhythmic patterns and “pieces.”

So all of this had transpired after the great struggle of June 1987. Nothing was organized per se, but since this incident [Yi Sökkyu's death by tear gas canister] had just happened they needed to determine quickly who could travel to Köje. . . . I had essentially taken a year off from school [Pusan National University] once I became fully devoted to the resistance movement that June. Since I wasn't encumbered by classes, I was free to go. As for the others, I'm not sure of the exact reasons why they went—but we kind of became makeshift *p'ungmul* team members once we were on site. . . .

We [the students from Pusan] were there for several days. This footage seems like it was taken on the day of the funeral. Because as I mentioned to you earlier, the funeral was delayed because the negotiations carried on for a long time. And so we went there and had to stay for a while. They were in the process of negotiations over there [Lee points in direction of the hospital on the computer screen], and so for these people who had gathered in front of the hospital, we would play music to give them strength to hold out.⁷²

In both excerpts, Lee's personal testimony helped me reconstruct the course of events that I had studied from audiovisual and textual sources. I had incorrectly assumed that the musicians who appeared in the video were all part of the same university *p'ungmul* group. I was also unaware that the student musicians had been on Köje Island for a number of days, helping through their musical performances to provide both entertainment and energy to the Daewoo laborers. Later on in the interview, I asked Lee about his own thoughts regarding the sonic associations *p'ungmul* had acquired that differed from its original context as folk percussion music. Lee described to me that by the mid-1980s, the mere sounds of drums and gongs would often signify that a protest was taking place in the vicinity. These sonic associations with dissent were understood not only by student activists but also by ordinary citizens. Lee explained:

P'ungmul wasn't just about the sounds or the *changdan* [rhythmic cycles]. By the time I started playing in 1984 and 1985, the sounds of *p'ungmul* had already acquired the associations [of protest]. Toward the end of 1986 we started to ponder this seriously. . . . Because when you stage a protest, you're trying to say something, right? Various ideas can emerge or by playing, we can express our own opinions or deliver our messages. We thought very seriously

⁷² Lee interview, May 12, 2009.

about how to convey these messages the most effectively to people through *p'ungmul* and other kinds of genres. . . . So the more one heard and saw it [*p'ungmul*], the people would understand what kind of message was being delivered.⁷³

As Lee addresses in his testimony, the playing of *p'ungmul* could signal a site of resistance or serve as a means to energize a group. Certain rhythmic patterns, when played, could activate choreographies of movement or channel collective energy in an efficient manner, all without the necessity for long-scripted dialogues.⁷⁴ In this sense, multiple meanings could be heard in the ears of the beholders—from a kind of Morse code for movement or action to the more familiar and benign associations of *p'ungmul* in its village contexts.⁷⁵ Experienced *p'ungmul* practitioner-activists thus played upon the ambiguity of meanings that could be tied to rhythms and the sonic output of *p'ungmul*.

THE DRUMMING OF DISSENT

In his *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James Scott discusses the use of various cultural forms as a subversive mode expressing dissent. He reflects on the various “manifold strategies by which subordinate groups manage to insinuate their resistance, in disguised forms, into the

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ch'ae Suhong's ethnographic work with *p'ungmul* groups within labor organizations reveal some of these encoded rhythmic messages. In a group lesson, Ch'ae transcribed the instructor saying, “This rhythm symbolizes strength and struggle (plays the rhythm); it's used just before a fight or a strike, when you want to change the atmosphere [drastically].” (See Ch'ae, *P'ungmul kwa nodongundong ka mandulki* [*P'ungmul* and the formation of the labor movement activists], 68). The actual rhythm the instructor played during the session is not identified for the reader, however. Suffice it to say that this aspect of musical coding is an area that deserves further investigation and research.

⁷⁵ Another example is provided by Suzanna Samstag. In e-mail correspondence, Samstag recalled the experience of going to Hanyang University in Seoul in order to watch a *Namsadang* performance on campus: “They got all set up and were ready to begin when someone from the school administration came running over and said that they couldn't play their instruments. The reason given was that the students would be ‘incited’ to riot if they heard the drums. Well, since without music there's not much to a *Namsadang* performance, they just packed up and left, much to my disappointment.” (Suzanna Samstag, e-mail correspondence, Nov. 30, 2006).

public transcript.”⁷⁶ The “collective representations of culture” that Scott discusses refers to aspects of popular (as opposed to elite) culture that “come to embody meanings that potentially undercut if not contradict their official interpretation.”⁷⁷ Scott’s theorizations of a “hidden transcript” provide a useful lens in viewing the incorporation of *p’ungmul* into the democratization movement in Korea.

P’ungmul, as a representation of folk culture, came to acquire a range of political identifications that sometimes drew on, appropriated, and manipulated its “official interpretations.” The concept of *kongdongch’e* (community), for instance, was originally associated with agricultural life but was reconfigured by students to tap into the *minjung* ideology. Selective appropriation was also key in this *minjung* agenda. The elements of a more traditional *p’ungmul*—the piercing sounds of the melodic wind instrument, the comic character actors, the complexities of rhythmic patterns, and the choreographies of dance—are conspicuously muted or absent in the pared-down version of *p’ungmul* that came to be performed by student activists in the 1980s.

In the early years of the student resistance movements, *p’ungmul* was deemed less explicitly political than resistance theatre genres since *p’ungmul* was an instrumental genre without text.⁷⁸ In the eyes of authorities, practitioners of *p’ungmul* were initially thought to be reviving a quaint folk tradition—little could officials have suspected that the clashing beats of drums and gongs would gradually come to signify dissonances of dissent in the public transcript. And as I have argued earlier in this chapter, the sounding of *p’ungmul* in performance was often an act that also escaped notice in the *written* transcript that is privileged by scholars of historical research.

⁷⁶ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 136.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁷⁸ Park, “Negotiating Identities in a Performance Genre,” 89.

Table 2.1. Six reasons for activists' selection of *p'ungmul*

<i>P'ungmul</i> had symbolic meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was the genre of music and dance performed by Korea's "common people"—the farmers. • Evocations of the <i>minjung</i> ethos
When played, <i>p'ungmul</i> was loud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The loudness of <i>p'ungmul</i> ensured that it was heard. • The clashing sounds of the small gong served as a signal for new rhythmic patterns, movement, and mood.
Basic rhythms were easy to learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>P'ungmul</i> could be learned in a short amount of time, unlike other folk music traditions like <i>p'ansori</i> or <i>t'alch'um</i>. • Aesthetics were less crucial than the ability to play in time and with spirit.
<i>P'ungmul</i> served as a sonic GPS system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to its loud volume, one could infer sonic directionality and choreographies of movement. • In a procession, the <i>p'ungmul</i> players were typically at the front of a line.
<i>P'ungmul</i> instruments were accessible and moderately priced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instrument production for percussion instruments increased significantly in the 1980s. • A related genre known as <i>samulnori</i>—that used the same instruments—became popular during the same time period.
The music of <i>p'ungmul</i> provided energy, especially in group settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The playing of <i>p'ungmul</i> in scenes of protest could activate group synergy or collective energy that had parallels to its original function in <i>ture</i> farming practice and ritual. A Korean concept of <i>sinmyǒng</i> (spirited enthusiasm) is also often used to express this collective energy or spirit invoked by group performances of <i>p'ungmul</i>.

From festive village rituals to the subversive sounds of protest, *p'ungmul* has shown both its adaptability and its adoptability by various sectors of Korean society. As the push for democratization began to appeal to broader sectors of Korean society (e.g., from labor to middle class) by the late 1980s, *p'ungmul* likewise shifted to incorporate new protagonists and performers in the dramatic struggle for

democracy. It is not surprising, then, that in the video footage from Yi Sökkyu's memorial protest we see a convergence of the newly forged alliances of students, laborers, and the residents of Köje Island. The performance of *p'ungmul* at this event fulfilled many of its intended meanings, from the ritual and the romanticization of the folk to the embodiment of *minjung* and the strength summoned by the masses. It is thus the malleability of *p'ungmul*—as music for the commoners, the students, and finally, the “masses”—that fuelled its potency as an instrument of dissent.

CHAPTER THREE:

INSCRIBING DIFFERENCE THROUGH TWO RELATED PERCUSSION GENRES

The word “Ori” in Korean means “we,” “our,” or “us,” reflecting the fact that pungmul is as much about developing a strong sense of community as learning pungmul. As such, we welcome everyone from the Greater Boston area to come learn the ancient Korean art of pungmul with us.

— Oori, 2006¹

I sought out the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Oori Korean drumming group in the fall of 2005, soon after moving to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to begin my doctoral studies in ethnomusicology. After attending the first rehearsal, which drew curious first-timers along with those more experienced, I lingered to talk with returning member Sam Cho.² Taking a seat on the concrete bench in front of MIT’s student center, I spoke informally with Cho, a 1.5-generation Korean American student who was studying at a local college and had commuted to Cambridge to lead the rehearsal.³ Considering that the network of Korean American drumming ensembles is a relatively connected one, it was not surprising to discover that we had mutual friends and acquaintances in both the United States and Korea.

¹ From a postcard entitled, “Ori – 우리”, Boston’s pungmul (Korean drum & dance) troupe, MFA for the Holidays, Dec. 14, 2006.”

² With some exceptions, pseudonyms are employed in this chapter.

³ “1.5 generation” is a term used to describe people who immigrated to a new country in their early to mid teens. “1.5-ers” generally retain fluency in the native language while also becoming proficient in the second language. The term is commonly used among Korean Americans.

SEATING THE PARADOX

I told Cho about the time I had spent studying and working in Korea, just prior to moving to Boston. With some hesitation, I also explained that I had worked for the SamulNori Hanullim organization during my residence in Korea. Without skipping a beat, he responded fervently, “I HATE *samulnori*!” Although aware of the criticism directed toward the newer *samulnori* genre by ardent *p’ungmul* “traditionalists,” I was nevertheless taken aback by such a visceral and spontaneous reaction. Perhaps as a result of seeing my expression, he back-pedaled slightly and then clarified that he actually did not mind playing *samulnori*, but he disliked the famous musicians who had first brought it to the stage. He favored the *p’ungmul* genre instead, for its more rooted associations with Korean history and culture and for its spirit of inclusiveness.

As this was my first meeting with Cho, I chose not to delve into a serious debate over the merits and shortcomings of *samulnori*. I also decided to keep my associations with SamulNori Hanullim at a low profile from that point on. There was no need to create potential rifts with the members of a group in which I was just an initiate. My primary motivation in joining Oori was to have an outlet for music performance during my first year of coursework. Still, Cho’s comment left an indelible impression and became the source of much curiosity for me over the course of the semester.

What might have been the source of such contempt? And how was it then, that the *music* of *samulnori* elicited ambivalence or even approval from those who claimed to hate it? In Cho’s case, much of his criticism was in fact leveled at personalities—people whom he had never met directly, yet about whom he had inherited stories and snatches of gossip from older friends (*sŏnbae*) involved with Korean percussion. It was unclear to me whether any of his friends were heavily involved with *p’ungmul* or even if they had met some of the original members of the SamulNori quartet. Over the course of the semester,

I started to hear pointed critiques about the *samulnori* genre from other members as well. In contrast to the adulatory praise voiced by SamulNori's first fans at the Space Theater in Seoul during the late 1970s and early 1980s, SamulNori/*samulnori*'s reception here was lukewarm, if not scornful. Perhaps the most memorable was a comment relayed by one Oori member that explained that *samulnori* was akin to a kind of *p'ungmul* in paraparesis; "playing *samulnori* is like playing *p'ungmul*, except with your legs chopped off." Here, the critique was directed toward the predominance of seated (앉은 반- *anjünban*) *samulnori* compositions as opposed to pieces performed while standing and dancing. The implication of this sharp comparison was that the genre of *samulnori* was a lifeless and static version of *p'ungmul*.

As I began to discover, the bulk of the criticism I heard in informal contexts that semester dovetailed with debates over which "authenticities" constituted tradition. Being less than thirty years old, *samulnori* was too young to qualify as "tradition" for some Oori members in their search for legitimate cultural symbols from Korea's ancient past. Another main point of contention was the fact that the *samulnori* genre did not invoke the same notions of "community" that were imbricated with *p'ungmul*. Where one was seen to emphasize technical mastery of repertoire, the other was viewed as a natural means to cultivate group participation and a sense of community. Yet as I observed in that semester and in subsequent years, the *samulnori* repertory and playing style remained an appealing and accessible point of entry for members of the Oori group, many of whom were encountering Korean music and Korean percussion for the first time.

In this chapter, I investigate the identity politics surrounding a Korean percussion genre as it appears in a transnational context. I consider the cultural pathways by which "people, instruments, recordings, videos, books and ideas" have traveled and modulated into musical practices and community

formation in places like Cambridge, Massachusetts.⁴ By paying close attention to what transpires with the circulations of various media, I explore the cultural politics that emerge with the engagement of an imported musical practice from Korea.⁵ In this chapter and elsewhere in my dissertation, I contend that the circulation of music recordings, workbooks, and texts cast into motion by the SamulNori quartet were in fact critical to the formation of many *samulnori* groups outside Korea.⁶ These transnational circulations are not passively received by their fans and practitioners overseas, however. In fact, the discourse surrounding these material circulations reveals that the SamulNori “source” was sometimes held in disdain or rejected outright. Based on discourse and ethnographic analysis, I uncover the complex and sometimes incongruous set of subjectivities that come into play when a local music ensemble interacts with distant musical traditions from which it has evolved.

As a member of the Boston-based Korean drumming group from 2005 to 2008, I closely observed the ways in which cultural politics took shape and how varieties of “difference” were used to inscribe identities. A rigorous reading of two texts—one from the Oori drumming group and the other from SamulNori Hanullim—illuminates the social and political meanings ascribed to Korean percussion genres by the Oori ensemble. This discourse analysis then leads to a consideration of musical practices and the ideas that inform them. I probe the relationship between discourse and practice and hone in on the more ambiguous areas where Oori members said one thing while playing another. It is through these analyses of text and musical practice that identity politics come to the fore.

⁴ Kwon, “The Roots and Routes of *P’ungmul* in the United States,” 39.

⁵ I use the term *media* here broadly to include audio and audiovisual recordings, texts, and notation.

⁶ See chapter 4: Global Encounters with SamulNori.

\$\$\$

Twelve Asian performers emerge in a group from the lower rotunda of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, raucously banging drums and gongs. They wear identical raiment, baggy white pants and over-sized black shirts accented with long sashes of blue, yellow, and red that plume in the back. Some have large hourglass drums strapped to their bodies; a few others carry metal gongs. With leisure and a playful gait, the group processes up the baroque staircase, one by one, while emitting yelps and grunts. The sound of a small brass gong is shrill and impertinent while large drums produce thumping beats. As the din reverberates throughout the museum's hallowed halls, crowds of the inquisitive and the offended begin to mill about on the lower and upper levels. Once upstairs, the group takes a moment to reassemble and experience the acoustics directly below the magnificent domed colonnade. With percussive fanfare, they then enter the museum's most prized hall, framed with Rubens and Van Dycks. Viewing of the masterpieces is temporarily suspended as the musicians heist the gallery and begin to dance and drum irreverently in the contemplative space. The scene is surreal and cacophonous from both visual and auditory standpoints.



Figure 3.1. Oori performing at the MFA. © Museum of Fine Arts.

In the peaceful sanctuary of the Koch Gallery of European Renaissance Masterpieces at the MFA, a spectacle takes place on this ordinary afternoon in December 2006. At once, it begs explanation for the assemblage of museum visitors turned makeshift-audience.

The performers, though playing spiritedly, do not appear to be professional musicians. In anticipation of this potential confusion, postcards for distribution are strategically placed on a table near the gallery's entrance. A description on the backs of the cards provides a much-needed explanation for the uninitiated:

A traditional Korean folk art ~2000 years old, pungmul [*p'ungmul*] was often performed for days to repel evil spirits or to celebrate planting of crops and harvesting. In Korea's traditionally agrarian society, pungmul played a central role by lifting the spirits of farmers, bringing the community together, and helping everyone complete strenuous tasks more efficiently during the planting and harvesting seasons. The joy and solidarity fostered by pungmul have contributed to its continued popularity.⁷

§§§

This slim informational postcard served two purposes for the Oori group. First, on a basic level, it explained to the audience what kind of music they were hearing and where it originated. Second, the card encapsulated with brevity a portrait of an ancient musical culture and why they invoked it. As previewed in the epigraph, the word "Oori" translates into monikers for the collective (literally, "us" or "we").⁸ For the group, the term reflects "the fact that pungmul is as much about developing a strong

⁷ Oori postcard, "Oori – 우리". Boston's pungmul (Korean drum and dance) troupe. MFA for the Holidays – Dec. 14, 2006."

⁸ Donna Kwon has discussed the emergent themes that are articulated in the discourse by Korean American *p'ungmul* practitioners—including, "Becoming 'One,'" "Sharing/Gathering," "Creating a Space," and "Culture/Sound/Spirit." Kwon

sense of community as learning pungmul.” The postcard also included a guide to participation for the audience. Expressions that are typically shouted to encourage performers during the course of performance (known in Korean as *ch’uimsae*) were transliterated and translated for the spectators.

How to participate

Cheer us on! Yell out:

***Joh-da!** (I like that! Yeah!)

***Uhl-ssi-gu!** [Hurrah!]

***Jal-han-da!** (You’re doing great!)

... or anything else you want. (Don’t be shy, pungmul is very free-form!)

The event at which the Oori drumming troupe performed was part of the “MFA for the Holidays” series in December 2006.⁹ At the time, the amateur ensemble consisted of a loose configuration of MIT students and “community” members who included students from nearby schools and a young family from Lexington. As a Harvard graduate student, I was one of the older community members performing at the event. With the exception of one Boston University undergraduate from Kazakhstan, all of us claimed some line of Korean descent, whether as a 1.5- or second-generation Korean American. During our noisy and spirited performance, I took note of the onlookers whose gallery viewing rights were temporarily suspended. For those museum-goers completely unaware of the hour-long event, there must have been a great deal of confusion experienced, ranging from consternation to piqued curiosity. I was curious to know what they were going to take away from this afternoon at the MFA, whether they knew

notes, “In the heavy usage of word units such as ‘Han’ [“one,” and also a marker for “Korea” 韓] and ‘Oori’ [“us” or “we”] we can see the desire to ‘become One’ or to develop a unified sense of the ‘We’ as Koreans/Korean Americans.” (See Kwon, “The Roots and Routes of *P’ungmul* in the United States,” 39-65.

⁹ Michalowski, “MIT Musicians Perform at MFA.”

about the event or not. And more central to my own research interests, I wondered how this Korean American drumming group was choosing to represent itself to the audience. One way of exploring this question was to examine the text that appeared on the group's publicity card, the content of which was essentially announced to the audience by the leader of the Oori group.

TRACES

I was struck by the words used both in the announcement and on the postcard, as they seemed uncannily familiar. It was not until a closer inspection that I realized the text was something I had indeed encountered before, albeit in a different iteration, while working as overseas coordinator for SamulNori Hanullim in Seoul a few years before. Penned by SamulNori's first managing director, Suzanna Samstag, the text was one segment of the program notes that accompanied SamulNori's performances outside Korea during the 1990s.

Entitled "Tradition Meets the Present," Samstag's essay was integrated as part of SamulNori's official English-language press kit for their annual U.S. tours co-organized by Herbert Barrett Management, a New York-based artist management company.¹⁰ As the only bilingual Korean and English speaker on staff, Samstag had a nuanced understanding of Korean culture coupled with a flair for writing. An excerpt of Samstag's essay follows:

From ancient days up until the outbreak of the Korean War [1950-1953], wandering entertainers called *Namsadang*, roamed across Korea visiting villages and cities. Upon announcing their arrival at the main gate of a village, they would make their way to the central courtyard and occupy it for the next few days and nights, performing satirical

¹⁰ As Samstag was about to leave her position at SamulNori in 1994, she began the process of seeking out a U.S. artist management company to represent the group in North America. Samstag negotiated with the Herbert Barrett Management company in New York; Herbert Barrett primarily represented artists in western classical music and took on SamulNori as part of their "Special Attractions" category.

mask dramas, puppet plays, acrobatic acts and shamanistic rites. After bidding the evil spirits to leave and good ghosts to come, the performers would invite all the villagers to gather, watch their acts and revel with them all night. These gatherings were an integral and important part of affirming life for the people of these isolated Korean villages for a countless number of centuries. The music that accompanied these gatherings can be described generally as *PoongmulNori*, “the playing of folk instruments.”¹¹

Although the name is not explicitly mentioned in this evocative opener, it soon becomes apparent to the reader that SamulNori is at the heart of the excursus. In the opening paragraph, the neo-traditional Korean percussion quartet is historicized and given a clear sense of lineage. The group’s predecessors were the itinerant male performance troupes known as *namsadang* that toured on the Korean “village music circuit” from the days of antiquity to the middle of the twentieth century, coinciding with both the end of the Japanese colonial period (1910–45) and the beginning of the Korean War (1950–53).¹² Among their acts was “PoongmulNori,” [*p’ungmul nori*] a composite of the words *p’ungmul* and *nori* (meaning “play” or “the playing of”). We also learn from the text that in addition to providing entertainment for villagers, the *namsadang* performed rituals of shamanic origin to purge the village of malevolent spirits while ushering in benevolent ones. In this opening exposition, SamulNori’s origins are clearly established. The remainder of the essay, which echoes some of the passages that can be found in the *Konggan* magazine, identifies SamulNori’s role as an usher to Korea’s journey from tradition to modernity:

At the time of the Korean War, Koreans were becoming more familiar with the city and its Western oriented culture, losing touch with rural life and its rhythms. Namsadang and their music were quickly relegated to mythology and obsolescence. True to this new Western influence, an elevated proscenium stage equipped with microphones, lights, and hi-tech equipment now stands where a stretch of grass used

¹¹ This excerpt is from the program used for SamulNori’s performances at the University of Michigan on February 17 and 18, 1996. See Appendix 2 for the entire text of the program.

¹² See chapter 1: Space and the Big Bang for a discussion of *namsadang* itinerant troupes.

to lie. SamulNori was formed in 1978 by descendants of these *Namsadang*, confronted by the changes in performance presentation, upheavals in Korean society and the quiet disappearance of their valuable musical heritage.

“We were shamans who played for the villagers’ needs and well being, and since the villages have changed we too must change,” notes Kim Duk Soo, master drummer and one of the founding members of SamulNori.

The stage setting may now be 20th century, but the instruments remain the same: *K’kwaenggwari* [*kkwaenggwari*], *Ching*, *Changgo* and *Buk* [*puk*]. The name SamulNori, literally meaning “To play four things,” refers to these four instruments, each associated with an element in nature.

The conclusion of Samstag’s essay addresses audience members directly, inviting them to experience the spirit of “massive village gatherings” of yesteryear, in a new, recontextualized setting. SamulNori’s unconventional entrée onto the stage, mimicking the *namsadang*’s arrival at the entrance of a village, is previewed for the audience:

In a few moments they will herald their arrival with the sounds of the drums and cry out:

Open the doors! Open the doors!
*The Guardians of the Five Directions: Open your doors!*¹³
When all of humankind enters, they shall bring with them endless joy!

We invite all of you to enter and be a part of the festivities.

INTERPRETIVE FRAMES

Using these two textual excerpts as the basis for comparative analysis, I now explain how meanings shift in transit when objects (in this case, texts) are put into circulation. Discourse analysis provides a means for addressing the implications of additions and redactions of texts that have appeared

¹³ This text refers to the bellowing pronouncement at the start of the *mun kut* (ritual performed at a gate) that was typically performed by *namsadang* troupes upon their arrival at a village (or Buddhist temple). By the time Samstag assumed the role of Managing Director for SamulNori in 1983, the *mun kut* and *pinari* had already become a standard (combined) element of the quartet’s repertory.

in global circulation. After coming to the realization that I had unwittingly stumbled upon an excerpt of text that had been in circulation for at least a decade, I became curious as to how these different iterations performed in different contexts and settings. How do revisions to a text, however slight, alter our interpretations of it? When considering texts that circulate across geographic and national borders, what is lost or gained in cultural translation? And, when reading texts that explain a musical genre, how might these circulating texts align with the musical practices that they represent? As an analytical point of departure, I turned to Derrida's hermeneutic metaphor of "différance" as a useful strategy for reading a text against its own grain. I summarize briefly the core of his argument.

DETOURS AND DEFERRALS

In "Différance," Derrida takes readers on an interpretive journey where we are asked to direct our gaze to an extreme interior, to the precise letters that configure words.¹⁴ Placed under the proverbial microscope is the word *différance*. It is a "neographism" that Derrida employs to illustrate a number of themes central to his Deconstruction project. By deliberately replacing the letter *e* with an *a* in the word *difference*, he draws attention to words that sound identical in speech but differ in meaning when rendered in written text. To Derrida, this "letter-play" serves to magnify the distinction between the oral and the written. What "cannot be apprehended in speech" gains specificity in text. The *a* in *différance* becomes a kind of diacritic that marks a contrast not in verbal but rather in textual articulation.

Différance is explained as "literally neither a word nor a concept." Derrida's tactic, however, is to illustrate the ways in which traces of meaning can be uncovered even from this "blank slate" of a word. He asks readers to consider the verb *différer*, which has two discrete meanings. One refers to "deferral," while the other summons the meaning of "different" or that which is "not identical, to be other,

¹⁴ Derrida, "Différance," 1-27.

discernible, etc.”¹⁵ In Derrida’s exposition, the word *différance* can refer simultaneously to the entire configuration of meanings.

READING FOR DIFFÉRANCE

Derrida’s invention of *différance* is an interpretive exercise designed to refract and refine our gaze to the written word; with this bifocal gaze, he enables us to see that meanings are constantly deferred in textual language. The following section deploys *différance* as a working methodology for close and rigorous side-by-side analysis of the Oori and SamulNori excerpts. Table 3.1 illustrates the provenance of the textual excerpt from the Oori postcard (hereafter referred to as the Oori text) by highlighting the words or phrases that share similarities with Samstag’s essay “Tradition Meets the Present.” Words that appear in bold type are near matches. Words or phrases that are rendered in italics have a lesser degree of word-for-word similarity, yet still bear uncanny resemblances.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8.

Table 3.1. Comparison of Oori and SamulNori texts

Oori (Passage 1)	SamulNori (Passage 2)
“About Pungmul” (2006)	“Tradition Meets the Present” (1996)
a. “A traditional Korean folk art ~2000 years old”	a. “ <i>From ancient days up</i> until the outbreak of the Korean War”
b. “pungmul was often performed for days ”	b. “they would . . . occupy it [village] for the next few days and nights ”
c. “performed for days to repel evil spirits ”	c. “After bidding the evil spirits to leave ”
d. “pungmul played a central role by <i>lifting the spirits of the farmers</i> , bringing the community together ”	d. “ the performers would invite all the villagers to gather , watch their acts and <i>revel with them all night</i> ”
e. “ <i>The joy and solidarity fostered by pungmul</i> have contributed to its continued popularity.”	e. “ <i>These gatherings were an integral and important part of affirming life</i> for the people of these isolated Korean villages for a countless number of centuries.”
f. “A traditional Korean folk art . . . pungmul was often performed for days.”	f. “The music that accompanied these gatherings can be described generally as PoongmulNori, ‘the playing of folk instruments.’ ”
<p>Key:</p> <p>Bold: exact or near matches</p> <p><i>Italics:</i> exhibit similarities</p>	

If, as Derrida asserts, words always bear the traces of other words, then Oori’s explanation of *p’ungmul* is imprinted from the stamp of Samstag’s essay. Not only does the sequential ordering of sentences align, but many key phrases and words are identical. Yet it is in slight turns of the phrasing and

subtle alterations to Samstag's text that alternative readings surface. The openers of both texts indicate "origins" and establish ancient legacies. In Passage 1a, the Oori text tells us *p'ungmul* is a folk art tradition that extends back approximately two thousand years. In Samstag's text, a chronology is delineated, "from ancient days to the outbreak of the Korean War." The dates specified in the two texts are at opposite ends of the spectrum of "tradition": Passage 1 gives definition to the presumed date of origin, whereas Passage 2 cloaks this starting point in mystical lore and underscores the year 1950 as a terminus. Entitled "Tradition Meets the Present," Samstag's essay gives the reader a clue as to how time is situated in this skillfully crafted narrative. Although the difference between the two passages may seem slight, the framing of "tradition" vis-à-vis "time" is an important distinction that emerges upon a close reading. While one passage gives voice to a tradition's breadth, the other defines a tradition's forward-looking trajectory.

Under a deconstructivist lens, these passages would serve as exemplary models to drive home the Derridean point that it is only through text that specificity is attained.¹⁶ Here, I draw attention to the italicized fragments in Table 3.1 that I contend are implicitly connected on a conceptual level, yet that do not exhibit the same word-for-word matching as those words and phrases represented in bold type. Much like Passages 1a and 2a, Passages 1e and 2e share a similar evocation of concept. In the latter, the main idea put forth is that of community. "The joy and solidarity fostered by *pungmul*" (Passage 1e) and

¹⁶ I acknowledge some of the limitations and critiques of the Derridean approach to the analysis of music. In *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, Ingrid Monson engages with poststructuralist thought and argues that the Derridean "writing over speech" predilection is actually reversed in musical practice: "difference is 'heard' primarily through the physical presence of sound, not in its various written representations." (See Monson, *Saying Something*, 207-208). This is an indispensable critique, and one to which I return in the second half of this chapter, when I consider musical practice. The materials presented thus far, however, are text-based. These texts "speak" to musical practice, and it is with the implements of deconstruction that I find it helpful to unearth those differences grounded in the text. Additionally, the analysis in this chapter reveals the complicated ways in which concepts and meanings are then mapped onto musical practice. Some of the examples demonstrate that *difference* (with an *e*) is not necessarily articulated with the same conviction in musical practice as it is in the discourse surrounding *samulnori* and *p'ungmul*.

“gatherings were an integral and important part of affirming life” (Passage 2e) are expressions of how communal well-being is maintained through the performance of *p’ungmul*. While it can be deduced from the SamulNori text that the “communal” was invoked through village gatherings featuring song and dance, the emphasis on community is more explicitly written into the Oori text.

READING FOR INTENDED DIFFERENCE

Table 3.1 provides a basic breakdown of the areas of congruence between the two texts presented. At first blush, concepts like the “timeline of tradition” were read as analogous in both passages. Upon closer inspection, however, slight alterations to Samstag’s text actually bring into relief differing points of emphasis when situating “tradition.” By peering further still into the interior of these passages, I began to take notice of some of the omissions and additions made to Samstag’s text in the Oori publicity card. Table 3.2 displays the series of revisions made to the Oori text.

Table 3.2: Omissions and additions in the Oori text “About Pungmul”

Oori’s “About Pungmul” read against SamulNori’s “Tradition Meets the Present”	
1. What is omitted from the Oori passage? (bold)	2. What is <i>added</i> in the Oori passage? (<i>bold, italics</i>)
a. “ wandering entertainers called Namsadang , roamed across Korea visiting villages and cities”	a. “ <i>pungmul was often performed</i> for days to repel evil spirits or <i>to celebrate planting of crops and harvesting</i> ”
b. “Upon announcing their arrival at the main gate of a village, they would make their way to the central courtyard and occupy it for the next few days and nights, performing satirical mask dramas, puppet plays, acrobatic acts and shamanistic rites. ”	b. “ <i>In Korea’s traditionally agrarian society, pungmul played</i> a central role by lifting the spirits of <i>farmers</i> , bringing the community together.
c. After bidding the evil spirits to leave and good ghosts to come, the performers would invite all the villagers to gather, watch their acts and revel with them all night.	c. “ <i>helping everyone complete strenuous tasks more efficiently during the planting and harvesting seasons</i> ”
	d. “ <i>The joy and solidarity fostered by pungmul have contributed to its continued popularity.</i> ”

The following analysis questions the implications of redactive revisions in such a short passage. In a side-by-side comparison of the texts, the deliberate omission of certain words and phrases become conspicuous; “absence” here requires explanation. The phrases identified in bold type (1a, 1b, and 1c) in the SamulNori text shape a vivid portrait of the *namsadang*—the itinerant troupes of male musicians and

entertainers who traveled from village to village at the end of the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910).¹⁷ Three of the four primary members of the SamulNori quartet, who were in their late twenties when the group formed in the late 1970s, had familial or direct ties to *namsadang* troupes.¹⁸ In his autobiography Kim Duk Soo describes some of his earliest memories of his father’s work in such a troupe and how he first came to participate as a child performer in the *mudong nori*.¹⁹ The *namsadang* connection, whether earned by virtue of kin or association, proved to be a potent symbol and an important legitimizing strategy for the SamulNori group. *Namsadang* lineage thus forms a central theme in the SamulNori lore and discourse. As a result of my familiarity with this language, it became evident to me that the Oori text was “inspired” by Samstag’s essay, yet lacked the *namsadang* frame of reference. Also curiously omitted from the short passage was the range of activities in which the *namsadang* engaged during their performances for villagers, from satirical mask dramas and puppet plays to shamanistic rites. What remains from the original passage, then, is the name of only one of the standard six acts—*p’ungmul*, which Samstag describes as “*PoongmulNori*: ‘the playing of folk instruments.’” No attribution to the *namsadang* is given in the Oori text, and the focus is shifted to the concept of *p’ungmul* instead. In other words, the emphasis is diverted from the *itinerant performing arts troupes* [*yurang yein chipdan*] that used to tour around Korea in years past to the *genre of music and dance* that they once performed. The graphic

¹⁷ The foremost authority on *namsadang* culture, folklorist Sim Usŏng, does not attempt to offer a definitive point of origin for these itinerant performance groups. He notes historical and literary sources that make reference to puppetry (one of the six acts featured in *namsadang* performances) and traveling entertainers, pre-dating the Chosŏn era. He is reluctant, however, to trace the origins of the *namsadang* troupe to these few references in the historical record. See Hesselink’s translation of Sim’s text in Hesselink, *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 20.

¹⁸ See chapter 1: Space and the Big Bang, for a discussion of the *namsadang* connection (i.e. Kim Duk Soo, Kim Yong-bae, and Lee Kwang Soo) held by the members of the (classic) SamulNori quartet.

¹⁹ Kim, *Gŭllobŏl kwangdae Kim Tŏk-su*, 21–30. *Mudong nori* refers to a portion of the *p’ungmul nori* act where performers balance young children on their shoulders while they dance. Kim Duk Soo made his debut as one of the children (*saemi*) in the *mudong nori*.

illustration used on the front of the Oori publicity card also reiterates the semantic shift from the *namsadang* to Boston's *pungmul* troupe.



<p><u>How to participate</u> Cheer us on! Yell out: *Joh-da! (I like that! Yeah!) *Uhl-ssi-gu! (") *Jal-han-da! (You're doing great!)</p> <p><i>...or anything else you want. (Don't be shy, pungmul is very free-form!)</i></p> <p>Join us for games & dancing at the end!</p> <p><u>About Oori</u> The word "Oori" in Korean means "we," "our," or "us", reflecting the fact that pungmul is as much about developing a strong sense of community as learning pungmul. As such, we welcome everyone from the Greater Boston area to come learn the ancient Korean art of pungmul with us. Visit us online: http://www.mit.edu/~oori</p>	<p><u>About Pungmul</u> A traditional Korean folk art ~2,000 years old, in the old days pungmul was often performed for days to repel evil spirits or to celebrate planting of crops and harvesting. In Korea's traditionally agrarian society, pungmul played a central role by lifting the spirits of farmers, bringing the community together, and helping everyone complete strenuous tasks more efficiently during the planting and harvesting seasons. The joy and solidarity fostered by pungmul have contributed to its continued popularity. Today, pungmul remains a part of national holiday celebrations and rituals.</p> <p><u>Today's Performers:</u></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td> Seul-A Bae Hyunji Do Hyunwoo Do Sunghee Do Minyoung Jang Alma Kassymova </td> <td> Minji Kim Minjoon Kouh Katherine Lee Jennifer Lin Jungyong Ryu Yoon Yeo </td> </tr> </table>	Seul-A Bae Hyunji Do Hyunwoo Do Sunghee Do Minyoung Jang Alma Kassymova	Minji Kim Minjoon Kouh Katherine Lee Jennifer Lin Jungyong Ryu Yoon Yeo
Seul-A Bae Hyunji Do Hyunwoo Do Sunghee Do Minyoung Jang Alma Kassymova	Minji Kim Minjoon Kouh Katherine Lee Jennifer Lin Jungyong Ryu Yoon Yeo		

Figure 3.2. Postcard created for the "MFA for the Holidays" event.

In my analysis of the transnational circulation of texts, I posit that there is a kind of “peasant consciousness” at play behind the revisions made to the SamulNori text, which shares syntactical and structural coherence with the Oori text. All references to the *namsadang*, which are scattered throughout the SamulNori essay, are entirely excised from the Oori text. I locate “absence” in the deliberate elimination of the subject and an act of erasure purposefully designed to revise and reconfigure a text’s meaning. This is illumined by way of the additional bits padded onto the Oori text that sculpt it in a distinctive way. Table 3.2 addresses these additions. With examples 2a–2d, an agricultural trope is cultivated, with emphasis on farmers, harvests, work, and community. A clear “protagonist” emerges in this modified passage; the itinerant *namsadang* troupe is replaced with *pungmul*—a Korean musical tradition two thousand years old. This expressive culture of Korea’s farmers and peasants, as is emphasized in chapter 2, is a powerful trope that was invoked by South Korean activists during the 1980s democratization movement.

The trope of *p’ungmul* is thus one that bears historical witness. And much like the “peasant consciousness” exhibited in the *minjung* historiographies of South Korean activist students in the 1980s, this particular “strategic essentialist” move wrests the peasants and their music into a new landscape and narrative.²⁰ In the Oori text, the *namsadang* itinerant entertainers are immobilized and left behind, and a new subject is seamlessly inscribed into the SamulNori “template.” The following examples, when compared side by side, demonstrate how with some strategic paraphrasing, one subject is substituted for another.

²⁰ I borrow here from Gayatri Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism.” In her assessment of the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) and the writing of new South Asian narratives that tried to rescue the hidden protagonists of older histories, Spivak asserted that the SSG amplified a subaltern voice that was not unproblematic. This affected “voice” became conflated with what Spivak identifies as “subaltern or peasant consciousness.” She argues that by ascribing a “subaltern consciousness” to historical texts, the SSG made “a *strategic* use of positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest.” (See Spivak, *In Other Words: Essays in Cultural Politics*, 205).

Table 3.3. Substitutions made in the Oori text

<p>Oori passage</p> <p>“...pungmul (a) was often performed for days <i>to repel evil spirits</i> or to celebrate planting of crops and harvesting. (b) In Korea’s traditionally agrarian society, pungmul played a central role by lifting the spirit of farmers (d) <i>bringing the community together</i>...</p> <p>SamulNori passage</p> <p>“After <i>biding the evil spirits to leave and good ghosts to come</i> (c), the performers would invite all the villagers to gather, watch their acts and revel with them all night.” These <i>gatherings</i> were an integral and important part of affirming life for <i>the people of these isolated Korean villages</i> for a countless number of centuries.</p> <p>Key:</p> <p><i>Italics</i>: shared concept</p> <p>Bold: newly added text</p> <p><u>Bold</u>: indicates a substitution of terms</p>
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The beginning of Samstag’s first sentence (c) in the SamulNori passage is revised and compressed into the more concise “to repel evil spirits,” while the agricultural motif is folded into the latter half of the first sentence in the Oori text. In its new iteration, Samstag’s *namsadang* protagonists then are removed from the narrative and replaced with joyful, albeit toiling farmers who perform *p’ungmul* for the village (a, d). Although there is not a direct one-to-one correlation of *namsadang* to “farmers,” I assert that the new subject formation is both drawn from the contextual background and ingrained in the Oori passage. This kind of substitution and indeed the extent to which revisionist prose permeates the Oori passage may remain undetected to most readers, but are visible when “reading within and against the grain” in the analysis of textual circulations.²¹ In short, I assess critically how new subjectivities of peasantry are implanted through these subtle yet defining textual revisions. When read against each other, these texts begin to reflect identities—identities often embroiled in their own politics. And as it becomes evident

²¹ Spivak, *In Other Words: Essays in Cultural Politics*, 202.

later on in this chapter, the texts also speak to the ways in which the ideologies of the *minjung* cultural movement have circulated over time and space (Chapter 2) and been strategically employed and transformed in new settings.

SAYING ONE THING, PLAYING ANOTHER

Questions remain as to what motivated some Oori members to distinguish themselves so strongly from SamulNori, why they chose to use these romanticized agricultural tropes as imagined metaphors for “community formation,” and how they have reconciled the musical and textual interconnectivities that exist between two genres that are viewed as ideologically incompatible. Over several years of interactions with the Oori *p’ungmul* group, I began to reflect on how *différance* was conceptually inscribed between the percussion genres of *p’ungmul* and *samulnori* in the eyes and ears of these college students. To many beginners in the Oori group, the two genres remained indistinguishable from one another, with both *samulnori* and *p’ungmul* collapsing into a broader, more generalized understanding of what Korean percussion is. For those members with more experience, often the primary mode of distinction was whether one played standing or seated (with *samulnori* signaling the seated version). I also observed a third and more nuanced level of differentiation among Oori members. In this case, members who were somewhat familiar with the histories and background of Korean percussion traditions would reject *samulnori* as a legitimate “source,” yet would still actively play pieces from the *samulnori* repertoire. I found this a curious contradiction, whereby these members of the group would identify strongly with *p’ungmul* on a conceptual level while playing *samulnori* pieces or a mixture of the two genres. Here, *différance* was engendered more in the articulation of Oori’s identity as a group through discourse and social action as opposed to in the performance of distinct musical genres.

For many of the Oori members who were second-generation Korean Americans, both *samulnori* and *p'ungmul* were new and unfamiliar genres. Even for those who spent their childhoods in South Korea, the actual practice and performance of Korean percussion was limited if not nonexistent during their time in Korea. Oori founding member Minjoon Kouh explained to me that he first saw a *p'ungmul* performance during a visit to the folk village near the outskirts of Seoul and that he participated in a five-day *samulnori* extracurricular activity during high school.²² For many other Korean American “1.5-ers,” interest in either *p'ungmul* or *samulnori* was sparked in the United States, post-immigration and often during the college years. In my own circles of acquaintances, very few Korean-born students I knew had undergone extensive training in traditional Korean music during their youth; thus, the learning and practice of Korean percussion was an endeavor that was first and foremost cultivated in the diaspora.²³ This introduction to Korean music, then, was facilitated in large part by the global circulation of audio and visual recordings and notation books as well as the movement of musicians and knowledgeable practitioners. To understand how these materials made it into the hands of first- and second-generation ethnic Koreans in the United States, a slight but necessary detour is apropos in considering the motivating factors that set these various circulations in motion.

TRANSNATIONAL CIRCULATIONS

At the tail end of the twentieth century, Korean percussion genres had traveled from villages and theaters in Korea to various global destinations via transnational routes. In the case of *samulnori*, the

²² Minjoon Kouh, interview, November 24, 2006.

²³ Mi-yon Kim's early study of a *samulnori* group based in Champaign, Illinois, confirmed this phenomenon. See Kim, “Musical Organizations in an Ethnic Student Group,” 84-92. For studies on *p'ungmul* performed by diasporic Korean American communities see: Kwon, “The Roots and Routes of P'ungmul in the United States”; Yu “Musical Performance of Korean Identities”; Gwak *Be(com)ing Korean in the United States*; Kim “Diasporic P'ungmul in the United States.”

eponymous quartet SamulNori first introduced the dynamic percussion genre to non-Korean audiences when they began to perform extensively on the world music circuit in the 1980s. By 1989 SamulNori had performed more than eight hundred concerts, and during the mid-1990s the group known as SamulNori Hanullim began to tour annually in the United States.²⁴ But it was not just the group that had traveled to distant locations. SamulNori's recordings made the figurative rounds as well, both within and outside Korea. SamulNori's Nonesuch recording of their 1983 Asia Society tour and the 1990 *Samulnori* "Record of Changes" album produced by Bill Laswell for CMP, for example, inevitably found their way into global circulation—sometimes through unconventional, non-mainstream routes.²⁵

Although legitimate channels existed for the distribution and sale of audio and audiovisual materials within South Korea, the acquisition of such media outside Korea during the 1980s proved a considerable challenge. In the United States, newly converted fans eager to listen to the music produced by the SamulNori percussion quartet would have been unable to locate a wide selection of CDs at the local record store, for instance. Short of traveling to Korea and bringing back purchased CDs, it was difficult or costly to obtain SamulNori-related media in the United States prior to the era of the Internet and digital technologies. Most of SamulNori's recordings were in fact handled by distributors based in Korea, Germany, or Japan. Some records were limited issue, while Japanese imports were priced much higher than the average CD.

For those who were interested in the older drumming practice of *pungmul*, likely spurred on by political affinities with the *minjung* activism seen in Korea in the 1980s, material resources were even

²⁴ SamulNori, *SamulNori/10 Years*.

²⁵ *Samul-Nori: The Legendary Recording by Original Members in 1983*. Nonesuch, 1983; *SamulNori "Record of Changes."* CMP Records, 1990. To illustrate the process, an Oori member lent me a version of a well-circulated DVD of SamulNori's 1987 Suntory Hall performance in Tokyo. The quality of the recording was extremely poor, as it was the result of duplication upon duplication of the VHS tape, with an eventual conversion to DVD. I promptly made a copy for my own records.

more difficult to come by in the United States. Unlike the *samulnori* genre, *pungmul* lacked the star presence of an international touring ensemble that could enhance its popularity and exportability outside Korea. To this day the few recordings of *p'ungmul* that exist are predominantly linked to academic projects and therefore are not commercially available. In addition the very nature of the *p'ungmul* culture, featuring performances at large-scale events that can last several hours, resists the notion of packaging the music into a tidy and concise recording for commercial purchase. *P'ungmul* enthusiasts have thus often relied on self-made audio or audiovisual recordings procured during trips to drumming camps or lessons held in Korea as one type of resource.²⁶

INFORMAL NETWORKS AND RESOURCE HANDLING

I suggest here that the initial transnational circulation of media related to SamulNori and to a lesser extent *p'ungmul* emerged from a culture of circulation largely driven by fandom and interpersonal networks.²⁷ Often various types of media were circulating via acquaintances or drumming groups without exhibiting any mark of provenance. One dedicated *samulnori* fan would return from Korea with CDs and VHS tapes, for instance, sharing these resources with fellow drumming enthusiasts. Personal copies were made, duplicated from second- and third-generation sources. Despite deteriorations in sound (and visual) quality over time, the well-circulated copies of SamulNori recordings were indispensable for groups without experienced instructors, and such informal recordings thus facilitated the passage of many fans-turned-practitioners.

²⁶ For a detailed, ethnographic account of a week spent at a center for *p'ungmul* transmission (of Imsil P'ilbong Nongak), see Kwon, "Music, Movement and Space," 240-252.

²⁷ A desire to *learn* how to play Korean percussion was a crucial factor in activating this culture of circulation as well. This led to a defining moment where mere musical appreciation or fandom was transformed into an embodied, physical engagement with Korean percussion music, eventually leading to the formation of percussion ensembles.

Similarly, the practice of notating or inscribing by hand *samulnori* rhythms allowed for another type of circulation. As in 1980s Korea, when student activists first encountered *p'ungmul*, the dictation or transcription of drum syllables proved to be critical to learning acquisition.²⁸ Notational resources for Korean percussion were passed along within drumming groups or from instructor to student.²⁹ Much like the “culture of sharing” exhibited with audio recordings, notation booklets such as the ones for standard pieces in the *samulnori* repertory were easily reproducible and were distributed among friends and fellow group members. Since the booklets were not sold in the United States, the circulation and distribution of notation were closely aligned with the personal networks of acquaintances and enthusiasts.

In the early to mid-1990s, however, the SamulNori organization and Sam-ho Music Publishers developed the first formalized instructional manuals for learning the *samulnori* genre. These were the first set of pedagogical materials produced for widespread distribution. Composer and pianist Im Dong-ch'ang [Im Tongch'ang] collaborated with the SamulNori quartet and then manager Suzanna Samstag to create a notational system for *samulnori* rhythmic patterns while also developing a manual that explained essential concepts governing traditional Korean music.³⁰ The English versions, translated by Samstag, were geared toward SamulNori's expanding international fan base and beginning students of the percussion genre.³¹ Over fifteen years after the initial publication of the first volume, the workbooks continue to be sold at major retail bookstores such as Kyobo and Youngpoong in Seoul. Although the

²⁸ See Figure 2.6.

²⁹ For a helpful explanation of the different forms *p'ungmul* and *samulnori* “notation” can take—from mnemonic syllable transcriptions of *ip changdan* (입 장 단- vocalization of rhythms) to modifications of SamulNori's notation (represented similarly to a Time Unit Box system)—see Soojin Kim's dissertation, “Diasporic *P'ungmul* in the United States,” 152-159.

³⁰ Im Dong-ch'ang, interview, August 6, 2010.

³¹ See Korean Conservatorium of Performing Arts, *Korean Traditional Percussion* and related volumes in the series.

collaboration between Im and SamulNori effectively ended after the publication of the third volume, the SamulNori Hanullim Research and Education Division continued to publish in-house notation books for other compositions, such as “Yöngnam nongak,” “Uttari p’ungmul,” and “Honam udo karak.”³² Available for purchase at minimal cost at the Puyö SamulNori Educational Institute, these notation books were more often photocopied and distributed freely to students attending workshops.

Another set of *samulnori* notations that was put into limited circulation in Korea and the United States originated from a substantial resource book known as the *Minsok kyoyuk charyojip* (민속교육자료집 - A collection of resources for folk arts instruction). Compiled by the Pongch’ön norimadang organization in Seoul, the book featured an overview of various genres of Korean folk arts, from masked dance to music. Providing detailed genre summaries and basic contextual information on Korean folk performing arts, the resource book also included notation for folk songs (*minyo*), *p’ungmul*, and *samulnori*. Two standard *samulnori* pieces, “Uttari samulnori” and “Yöngnam samulnori” were transcribed from SamulNori’s recordings and a previously existing notation printed by the Korean Traditional Arts Research Institute (1990).³³ Since the Pongch’ön norimadang was a community organization that had activist tendencies during the democratization movement, their resource book, or parts of it, tended to circulate among groups sympathetic to the student activists in Korea. The now-defunct Korean Youth Community Center (KYCC) organization in Oakland, California, for instance, heavily consulted this resource book. Perhaps more than any other Korean American culture

³² The educational director of SamulNori Hanullim at the time, Kim Dong-won, was largely responsible for the transcription and notation of the other *samulnori* compositions.

³³ Pongch’ön norimadang, *Minsok kyoyuk charyojip* (“9. Kyönggi-do Ch’ungch’öng-do Uttari Samulnori” and “10. Yöngnam Samulnori”), 368-388.

organization, KYCC was closely engaged in educating its members about traditional Korean performing art forms and social activism.

In this take one and pass it on mode, with circulations of audio and print media passing through different hands over time, it is not surprising to find that these resources were sometimes adapted or personalized by those to whom the materials were bequeathed. Oori founding member Minjoon Kouh noted in an interview with me that photocopies of notation booklets for *samulnori* rhythms circulated regionally within the United States, often coming from the two major hubs for Korean diasporic communities, Los Angeles and New York. Sometimes the copies would bear the signatures of former owners—hitherto unknown to the successive recipients of the photocopied notation.³⁴ I have also seen instances where notation is either retyped for clarification or modified to reflect a change in an instructor's arrangement of a *samulnori* piece. Sometimes even the simplest modifications, however, belied revisions that would have broader implications.

REINSCRIBED NOTATIONS

During the first year I was a member of the Oori drumming group, I received a photocopied notation for a piece that the group was rehearsing for a performance. Since the members of the group were falling a bit behind in preparations and memorization of the piece, notation of a *p'ungmul* piece was distributed as a way to expedite the acquisition process for the rhythms. In a moment not dissimilar to my revelation with the MFA Oori postcard, I also discovered traces of familiarity with the notation that was handed to me. The front page had “Yöngnam nongak” hastily scrawled on it as the title of the piece.

³⁴ Minjoon Kouh, interview, November 24, 2006. In Kouh's case, he recalled the experience of receiving a copy of “Yöngnam Samulnori” notation with a name inscribed on the first page. Several years later, he had a chance encounter with the former owner of the booklet, a member of a *pungmul* group based in Los Angeles.

Flipping through the next few pages, I recognized it as the SamulNori Hanullim version of the “Yŏngnam nongak” (or also referred to as “Yŏngnam samulnori”) notation. The cover page clearly identifying it as a SamulNori publication, however, was not photocopied along with the rest of the notation. Without the title page, the SamulNori connection to the notation was effectively erased, in much the same way that the *namsadang* references were redacted from the Oori postcard.

For newcomers to Korean percussion in the Oori group, the sonic distinction between the two genres of *p’ungmul* and *samulnori* was an abstruse one, its obscurity compounded by a fluid interchangeability of musical practice and names. Standard *samulnori* compositions were often literally referred to as *p’ungmul*, and in a related conflation, the more historically rooted conceptualization of *p’ungmul* was sometimes confused with the sounds of *samulnori* in practice. These ambiguities were not specific to Oori but part of a relatively common phenomenon in the United States where amateur drumming groups identified themselves as a *p’ungmul* ensemble yet specialized in a *samulnori* repertory. Soojin Kim’s 2011 dissertation on Korean American *p’ungmul* groups in New York and Los Angeles reveals a similar paradox. I quote from Kim:

For Korean American *p’ungmul* practitioners in their twenties and thirties, *samulnori* is not a traditional performance genre because *samulnori* does not have [a] long history and does not reflect the thoughts, spirits, and philosophy of [their] ancestors due to its emphasis on the exclusively musical aspects of the performance. The Korean American performers in their twenties and thirties conceive of *samulnori* as “a show.” The word show is often used with a negative nuance in Korea. For example, “show *handa* (쇼한다)” means that one does something very ridiculous. Thus, when the performers describe *samulnori* as a show, it has a meaning that throws a negative light on *samulnori*. Despite their concept of the *samulnori* genre, however, the collegiate performers often do put *samulnori* pieces together for cultural events and festivals.³⁵

³⁵ Kim, ““Diasporic *P’ungmul* in the United States,” 306. I would add that the meanings of the “Konglish” (Koreanized English) expression “show *handa*” (“putting on a show” or “showing off”) also embed a critique of insincerity or disingenuousness attributed to the performers.

Nathan Hesselink also observed the blurred distinctions in presentation and practice between the two genres, “particularly among college drumming groups and clubs, where rhythms and approaches have begun to meld into something not entirely one or the other.”³⁶

In its first formation, the MIT Korean drumming group (first Hansori, later known as Oori) performed exclusively from the *samulnori* repertory. “Yöngnam samulnori” and “Uttari samulnori” were two of their standby pieces that Hansori performed at Korean culture shows and events such as the one pictured at Wellesley College in 1994.



Figure 3.3. Hansori group performance, Wellesley College, February 18, 1994.
©Hansori.

Minjoon Kouh noted that the Hansori group had once attempted to play in the *p’ungmul* style (*sönbán*) while standing, but they were unschooled in how to fasten the instruments properly to their bodies. Since they had first been instructed by someone who was trained in the *samulnori* genre, it was only natural that the group perform compositions from the *samulnori* repertory, which were also accessible in

³⁶ Hesselink, “*Samul Nori* as Traditional,” 432.

terms of resources such as notation and recordings that were in circulation and available to consult.

From 1993 to 2005, Hansori and its successor Oori were by default a *samulnori* ensemble. Yet, from the beginning, the group called itself a *p'ungmul* group.

When I joined the group in the fall of 2005, instructor Sam Cho began actively distancing Oori from playing their usual *samulnori* repertory. Prior to the first meeting, I was told by Haerim Wang that the primary objective of the semester was to learn the seated *samulnori* piece known as “Samdo söl changgo,” which featured the hourglass-shaped drum. A revised “syllabus” was sent out in mid-September, however, clearly indicating that the new objective for the group was to build foundational skills in *p'ungmul* practice. Cho taught the group basic rhythmic cycles that he had learned from KYCC in Oakland; the *karak* (rhythms) largely informed by the Imsil P'ilbong *nongak* form of drumming from the Honam chwado region.³⁷ Since many members of the group were beginners and faced the challenge of coordinating the act of drumming while moving, much time was spent on drills and reviewing basic rhythmic patterns.

³⁷ The Imsil P'ilbong Nongak preservation society (임실필봉농악보존회) has also printed notation booklets and holds intensive training sessions (*chönsu*) for groups and individuals throughout the year. Cho consulted one of the notation booklets while he was leading the Oori group. (For a map of *p'ungmul* regional styles, see chapter 1).

Oori Pungmulpae Schedule

(Fall 2005)

Date		Location
9/10	Learn 궁 (Gung) and 따 (Ddah). Learn about the old history of 풍물 (Pungmul).	KRR A
9/17	Review 궁 (Gung) and 따 (Ddah). Learn 덩 (Deong). Learn 이 채/휘 모리 (E-chae/Hwimori).	KRR A
9/24	Learn 삼 채/자진 모리 (Sam-chae/Jajinmori).	KRR A
10/1	Learn 삼 채 (Sam-chae) and 대 동 놀 이 (Daedongnori). Learn simple 진 풀 이 (Jinpuri).	KRR A
10/8	Columbus Day (Possible MT)	TBA
10/15	Review. Learn 굿 거 리 (Kutgeori).	TBA
10/22	Learn how to maintain instruments. THIS MEETING IS MANDATORY!! (Talk to Haerim in advance if you can not make it.)	Student center 4 th Floor
10/29	Learn 오 방 진 (Obangjin) and 진 오 방 진 (Jinobangjin).	TBA
11/5	Last day of 8-week Pungmul class. Small performance, and evaluation.	KRR A
11/12	Veteran's Day (No meeting)	
11/19		
11/26	Thanksgiving (No meeting)	
12/3		
12/10	Last official meeting of the semester.	

Make sure you also practice individually during the weekdays.

Figure 3.4. Oori class and practice schedule.

For beginners with no musical background, there turned out to be a steep learning curve for *p'ungmul* that semester. When a request came in near year's end for a performance at a Korean culture event hosted by the Sloan School of Management's Korean Student Association, Oori was not ready to unveil their newly learned *p'ungmul* rhythms as a performed piece for highlighted showcase. A decision was made to perform an eight-minute "Yŏngnam samulnori" instead, since a few of the Oori members were already familiar with the piece and since the nature of the event was better suited for a concise *samulnori* piece. The previously mentioned "Yŏngnam nongak" notation was distributed as a way of getting the performing members up to speed and reacquainted with the piece. For those in the know, the *samulnori*

piece was a convenient and trustworthy substitute for the *p'ungmul* rhythms (learned during the course of the semester) that did not come together as effectively as a piece for public presentation.³⁸ But to newer members of Oori, the *retour* to the *samulnori*-based repertoire was not an apparent *detour*; the sounds and musical practices of *samulnori* became confused or even synonymous with their newly acquired understanding of what *p'ungmul* was, especially within the context of their semester-long introduction to the ancient drumming tradition of Korea.

IMAGINED FARMLANDS AND PEASANTHOOD

Diasporic Koreans involved in *p'ungmul* have often employed various types of metaphors of rootedness, community, and homeland in their discourse.³⁹ As a genre of “rural band percussion music and dance,” *p'ungmul* was deeply entrenched in the rhythms of agricultural life in a pre-industrialized Korea—images, ideas, and sounds that appealed to those striving to connect with a “real, authentic Korea.” Yet, much as when university students in Korea appropriated *p'ungmul* for use in protests and to connect with the *minjung* ideology, the learning and practice of *p'ungmul* by overseas Koreans has been an experience constructed and informed by logistical, ideological, and political concerns. While “peasantconsciousness” may have been at play through discourse, the actual performance of “peasanthood” needed much practice and tending.

My analyses of various circulations at work accompanied by close readings of two related texts are conducted in the service of trying to understand the identity politics of Oori, just one of many contemporary Korean American percussion ensembles. I suggest that an idealized vision of “community”

³⁸ A year later, in December 2006, however, the group had learned to be more comfortable with the *p'ungmul* style and thus played standing and moving for the MFA performance opening this chapter.

³⁹ See Kwon, “The Roots and Routes of *P'ungmul* in the United States.”

is central in this discussion and merges in interesting ways with the *minjung* discourse that was prevalent during South Korea's democratization movement. As mentioned in my preceding chapter on the role of music in protest culture, student activists were attracted to tropes of "the communal" or "the collective" in their historiographical project to give voice to Korea's peasant class—to, in effect, reach the "masses."

I assert that the semantic meanings of *kongdongch'e* (공동체/共同體) have been effectively transplanted and translated into the catch-all of "community" by the Korean American members of the Oori ensemble.⁴⁰ On one level, the trope of community mapped directly onto efforts to cultivate a community music ensemble that was largely framed by ethnicity. But on a deeper level, the associations of *kongdongch'e* within a historical and agricultural context worked double-duty to convey a kind of emergent peasant consciousness with an accompanying stake of authenticity. I present once more the brief description of *p'ungmul* that appeared on the Oori postcard:

A traditional Korean folk art ~2,000 years old, in the old days pungmul was often performed for days to repel evil spirits or to celebrate planting of crops and harvesting. In Korea's traditionally agrarian society, pungmul played a central role by lifting the spirits of farmers, bringing the community together, and helping everyone complete strenuous tasks more efficiently during the planting and harvesting seasons. The joy and solidarity fostered by pungmul have contributed to its continued popularity. Today, pungmul remains a part of national holiday celebrations and rituals.

The Oori website provides further clarification on *p'ungmul*:

"Pungmul was often found at the center of community activities. Also heightening the sense of community during pungmul performances is the fact that they traditionally take place in open spaces rather than on stage, where there is no boundary between the audience and the performers."⁴¹

⁴⁰ See chapter 2: The Drumming of Dissent during South Korea's Democratization Movement, for a discussion of *kongdongch'e*.

⁴¹ <http://web.mit.edu/oori/www/> (accessed April 10, 2010).

With this last sentence, we may peer once again into the interiors of prose and examine the nuanced implications of that which is curiously extracted from the given narrative. The spatial references make clear that *p'ungmul* and *samulnori* genres are being compared, with *samulnori* the most obvious fit for the proscenium stage. Once again, we see the traces of *samulnori*—through its absence. The irony that notwithstanding all the *p'ungmul* discourse, most of Hansori and Oori's performances have indeed been of *samulnori* pieces is a point cast firmly into focus in this inquiry. In a sense—in their own ways and using the resources now in circulation—diaspora groups have almost inadvertently reenacted the original SamulNori quartet's experience of aiming to draw from rural and communal Korean roots and adapting material for new contexts and identities.

COMMUNITY FORMATION

In an age when ideas, objects, and sounds are in motion and circulation, people are free to take what they wish and employ it to their own advantage. In the case of Hansori, the group formed as a result of searching out an activity that reflected and represented the ethnic background of its Korean American participants. While they were learning a performative Korean folk art, romanticization of traditional Korean culture as an agrarian idyll also occurred. *P'ungmul* best sounded out a kind of “peasant consciousness” whereby the community worked together to till the land and reap the rewards of their toil. This metaphor for community and also peasanthood reinforced their own visions for community formation (by lines of descent and affinity) as a Korean American group in a diverse college campus setting. Musically, however, the learning of *p'ungmul* posed a challenge. It is here that the traces of SamulNori become apparent, through the various circulations that facilitated musical practices by the group.

Yet Oori's ambivalent relationship to the *samulnori* genre has persisted. In 2011, after teaching and fieldwork, I visited a few Oori rehearsals. Under a new leader, the group now exclusively practices and performs pieces from the *samulnori* repertory. Although the leader has trained in *p'ungmul*, he maintains that the *samulnori* genre is best suited for teaching beginners and for preparing for public performances. When asked by a newcomer what the difference between *p'ungmul* and *samulnori* was, familiar territory was revisited with a response that equated *p'ungmul* with community and *samulnori* with "show." He further clarified that there are performances done within the context of *p'ungmul* but that ultimately, the function of *p'ungmul* had to do with forming strong bonds and a sense of community.

From the time I first joined Oori, the group has had a complicated and variegated reception of the *samulnori* genre and has chosen instead to identify strongly with the philosophy of the "rural collective," informed by *p'ungmul*'s ethos and its agrarian roots. The members of Oori clearly have had matters in their own hands and have decided which symbols and sounds to embrace and which to discard in their musical practice and self-representation. With these "audible entanglements" I have learned to hear irony while carefully discerning the cultural politics informing these percussive notes that share the same rhythmic DNA.⁴² To me, *différance* has come to register like the sounds of *samulnori*, with the musical subtext of community formation. I argue that what is most instructive about this inquiry is not the differentiation between two related percussion genres but rather the uncovering of various transnational circulations that exhibit micro-level processes of localization and individuation. Material resources that are in global circulation and the discursive threads related to these resources may or may not be received in tandem. Indeed, one individual's words (or erasure thereof) can have lasting reverberations and effects on how an idea or a narrative may be interpreted in future circulatory paths.

⁴² See Guilbault, "Audible Entanglements," 40–41, and *Governing Sound*, 284; Hesselink, "Samul Nori as Traditional."

CHAPTER FOUR: GLOBAL ENCOUNTERS WITH SAMULNORI

For a foreign audience, listening to SamulNori is about, above all, listening to music. Music pure and simple—to be judged on the practitioners’ musical excellence and their ability to entertain, which were in SamulNori’s case, always extraordinary.

—Suzanna Samstag, 2008.¹

The SamulNori quartet experienced unprecedented success during the same decade when South Korea struggled with its democratization movement. Despite the political turmoil at home, the quartet managed to make inroads on the world music circuit and also received financial backing and sponsorship from the South Korean government. One of SamulNori’s enduring legacies has been their luck with cultivating fans not just in their native Korea but also in pockets around the world. As the quartet toured in various locales around Europe, Japan, and the United States in the early 1980s, they often left newly converted fans in their wake. It seemed as if the group’s drumming (and dancing) spoke volumes on its own and required little by way of cultural translation for non-Korean audiences. In a *New York Times* review of a SamulNori performance at the Irving Plaza in 1984, critic Jon Pareles described each percussion piece as an “accelerating crescendo, starting with stately patterns and working up to stomping, clanging music with the drive of a locomotive.” He went on to praise the second half of the performance, noting that the “effect was spectacular . . . when the costumed members of Samulnori not only maintained intricate, exact rhythms, but leaped and danced in a circle as whirling plumes on their

¹ Samstag, “Why Are Foreign Audiences Thrilled by SamulNori?,” 8.

hats traced streaks in the air.”² Loud and pulsating percussion music coupled with whirling white ribbons, acrobatic twirling, and graceful dance movements formed the ingredients for a complete sensory experience for international audiences. In these performances the audiences were witness to a musical tradition that was visceral yet enchantingly distant.



Figure 4.1. SamulNori receiving applause in Hamburg, West Germany. (Photograph by Ichiro Shimizu)³

It was often at this first encounter with SamulNori/*samulnori* that indelible impressions were formed. For many first-timers, the experience of viewing a SamulNori performance was simply an introduction to Korean percussion or, more broadly, to Asian music. For others, the *music* of that first encounter resonated long after the performance, piquing the curiosity of those interested in Korean percussion and eventually giving way to a discovery of the group’s recording history. And for still other spectators, the encounter was a life-changing one—an important juncture that would lead to an active

² Jon Pareles, “‘Night of Percussion’ at Irving Plaza,” *New York Times*, July 2, 1984.

³ Japanese photographer Ichiro Shimizu traveled with the SamulNori quartet during the 1980s and documented many of their performances. Several of Shimizu’s iconic images of the group are chronicled in a photo essay book entitled *SamulNori*, published by Art Space in 1988.

engagement with learning how to play *samulnori*. The salience of this moment of conversion rests in the transformation of passive reception to an active state of learning and performance. In the case of a few individuals, this conversion from fandom to a desire to become a *samulnori* practitioner led to numerous trips to Korea to train directly at the SamulNori Hanullim Puyö Educational Institute. And a handful of “SamulNorians” have made the decision to devote their lives to music performance, focusing specifically on Korean percussion.⁴

In this chapter, I give attention to some of these musical encounters as they have emerged in myriad transnational contexts. I am guided in part by recent ethnomusicological and anthropological investigations of similar cross-cultural encounters in relation to world music genres. In the introduction to *Music and Globalization: Critical Encounters*, anthropologist Bob W. White states:

The notion of “global encounter” refers to situations in which individuals from radically different traditions or worldviews come into contact and interact with one another based on limited information about one another’s values, resources, and intentions. An encounter can be limited in its frequency or duration but can also be characterized by constancy and repetition.⁵

Like White, I interpret “global encounters” in broad terms. I view these less as singular meetings between strangers from different parts of the world than as a process of cross-cultural exchange that is often asymmetrical. In the plural form, “encounters” can be ongoing and can also serve as fertile ground for developing a commonly shared interest—in this case, music. The global musical encounters with the quartet and the second-generation SamulNori Hanullim troupe have been at the heart of the *samulnori*

⁴ The term “SamulNorian” has been used to describe an avid fan of SamulNori. Although I have been unable to verify the precise entry for “SamulNorian,” many press materials on SamulNori (and subsequent newspaper articles) note that the term was included in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

⁵ White, *Music and Globalization*, 6.

genre's popularization and transmission outside South Korea. Sites of performance have often been central to these musical encounters.

In my framing of encounters, however, the encounter itself does not always privilege a person-to-person interaction. As ethnomusicologists Tim Taylor and Steven Feld have previously pointed out, many encounters with world music have been mediated by the experience of listening to audio recordings—a phenomenon inextricably linked with the world music recording industry.⁶ Thus one's first encounter with the music of Senegal can be through a CD of Youssou N'Dour and not necessarily through the attendance at a N'Dour live performance. In a similar vein, other avenues of discovery have emerged over the three decades since SamulNori's debut. First musical encounters with the *samulnori* genre can be mediated via SamulNori's recordings and also introduced by way of *samulnori* notation that pedagogues or amateur *samulnori* ensembles employ. I locate these various types and degrees of musical encounters as a critical node in this reception study. By exploring the more personal dimensions to these musical encounters, I aim to bring into relief the cultural politics at play in the reception of *samulnori* over time, while also addressing the "social processes of resignification" of the meanings ascribed to Korean percussion by different actors in various geographical and cultural landscapes.⁷

In this chapter I narrate some of the more exceptional encounters that have resulted in life-changing circumstances, alongside the more casual ones. Through ethnographic observation and interviews conducted with *samulnori* practitioners based primarily outside Korea, I examine the different paths of entry into their encounters with SamulNori and subsequent journeys of discovery with Korean percussion music. Whether it was the experience of watching a SamulNori performance on a stage in Berlin or the circulation of cassette tapes and workbooks among U.S.-based college *p'unngmul* groups, it is

⁶ See Taylor *Global Pop*; Feld "From Schizophonía to Schizomogenesis"; and Feld "A Sweet Lullaby for World Music."

⁷ I borrow this phrase from Steven Feld's "My Life in the Bush of Ghosts," 41.

clear that these encounters are all activated under the canopy of globalization. Increased networks of connectivity and transcontinental travel have facilitated the circulations of people, media, and texts. Yet, as these narratives of “global encounters” reveal, it is most often at the individual level or in a modest constellation of individual networks that cultural exchanges are fostered across national boundaries. And in the case of *samulnori* groups that have sprung up in places outside South Korea, it is the individual encounter with SamulNori that is both formative and generative.

My former status as a SamulNori Hanullim employee provided me with a wealth of opportunities to tap into a broad and far-flung network of international *samulnori* fans—some of whom I had met while working in Korea. The personal connections I have cultivated with many SamulNorians over the years (and the conversations I have shared with them) are critical to my own understanding of how SamulNori/*samulnori* is experienced by Koreans but also by many non-Koreans. I profile some of these global encounters with SamulNori, delimiting my analysis to those individuals whom I met in South Korea prior to and during my fieldwork year (2008–2009). Furthermore, I focus only on people who participated in some capacity at the 2008 World SamulNori Festival in Puyŏ, South Korea, an event at which I volunteered. All my interviewees attended the festival and competition as members of *samulnori* groups representing four different countries: the United States, Mexico, Switzerland, and Japan. The sole individual profiled in the chapter, Suzanna Samstag, was invited to serve as an adjudicator at the World SamulNori Festival.

I chronicle and study individual encounter narratives and employ them to map out how these *samulnori* groups formed in places outside Korea, often skirting the well-worn pathways that are traversed by ethnic Koreans in diasporic networks. My objective is to give definition to the initial

“encounter” as it elicits subsequent cross-cultural interactions.⁸ In doing so, I provide the necessary context for the final chapter of the dissertation, where I closely examine the World SamulNori Festival of 2008—a large-scale event that culminated in the convergence of all profiled individuals at the native terrain from which the *samulnori* genre was born. I center my analysis primarily on the opening event of the festival for both its symbolic currency for the SamulNori Hanullim organization (in affirming the global reach of the *samulnori* genre) and its remarkable literal and figurative “homecoming” of sorts for these international *samulnori* ensembles. The festival also serves as a locus by which to view a complicated and interrelated patchwork of individual, local, national, and transnational connectivities.

It is important to underscore that my intent in this chapter is to elucidate encounter narratives that reveal the various paths into an engagement with Korean musical practices and culture. I do not aim to write ethnographies of international *samulnori* ensembles. To do so would have required several years of multi-sited research and a healthy budget. This kind of research would in fact be best suited for a team of researchers working in collaboration with one another. On other fronts, there is now a growing body of scholarly work investigating the learning and practice of *p’ungmul* by overseas Koreans in the United States. S. Sonya Gwak’s ethnography of a Philadelphia-based *p’ungmul* group uncovers the ways in which a group of Koreans in America engage in cultural practices such as *p’ungmul* performance as a means to cultivate a sense of ethnic identity.⁹ Similarly, Youngmin Yu and Soojin Kim’s dissertations also consider the performance of *p’ungmul* by Koreans Americans in Los Angeles (Yu and Kim) and New York (Kim), honing in on the many cultural negotiations that take place in the quest to reflect a hybridized Korean

⁸ It is important to note that the group profiles are not intended to be comprehensive histories. As with most musical groups, membership changes over time and impacts group dynamics, choices of repertoire, performance practice, etc. Thus the profiles serve more as snapshots and introductions to the encounters with SamulNori/*samulnori* that have led to community formation.

⁹ Gwak, *Be(com)ing Korean in the United States*.

American identity.¹⁰ The general thrust of my inquiry (Chapter 3) into a Korean percussion group in Boston is also about Korean Americans and their relationship to Korean (musical) culture, although my emphasis there involves rigorous analysis of texts in transnational circulation that reveal a complex field of cultural politics. As that study demonstrates, encounters with various texts play an important role in this group's set of identity politics. I turn now to several global encounters with SamulNori/*samulnori* that have had lasting repercussions.



Figure 4.2. Suzanna Samstag with her two children, Sang-hyuk and Jiyun at the World SamulNori Festival, October 2008. Photograph by author.

SUZANNA SAMSTAG, A PIVOTAL FIGURE

My visit to the first site of the SamulNori scene, the Space Theater, is described in Chapter 1. Suzanna Samstag was my patient and informative guide to the theater and to many discussions about the SamulNori quartet. As one of SamulNori's true insiders, Samstag represents a vital link to the group's success outside Korea and the ways in which international audiences first learned about the "drummer-

¹⁰ See Yu, "Musical Performances of Korean Identities," and Kim, "Diasporic *P'ungmul* in the United States."

dancers from Korea.”¹¹ How did an American woman (then in her twenties) end up managing South Korea’s most famous musical quartet for over ten years? The answer perhaps lies in Samstag’s own first encounter with SamulNori.

Fresh out of undergraduate studies at Georgetown University, Suzanna Samstag first arrived in Korea in 1980 as a Peace Corps volunteer. Assigned to work as a tuberculosis control specialist, she participated in home visits and health education programs throughout the country. When her tour of duty unexpectedly ended a year early due to Peace Corps budget cuts, she was presented with the options of returning to the United States, relocating to Tonga, or renewing her Korean visa for the remaining year.¹² She elected to stay in Korea and enrolled at Seoul National University (SNU) as a graduate student. Samstag’s first year at SNU was devoted to Korean language study, and it was in 1982 that her Korean language teacher took her class to see a performance of Korean music at the Madang Sesil Theater (마당세실극장) in Taehangno (Seoul).¹³ Little did Samstag know at the time that attending the concert would be a life-altering experience. The group that performed consisted of four wiry guys playing traditional drums and gongs; she said they were at the top of their form.¹⁴ After hearing the newly unveiled *Söl changgo karak* (rhythmic patterns performed on four *changgo* drums), Samstag

¹¹ I borrow from an oft-cited headline that appears in SamulNori’s press kit. See Jack Anderson, “From Korea, Drums and Dancers,” *New York Times*, February 1, 1985.

¹² Harris, *Faces of Korea*, 405.

¹³ On January 9, 2009, I moderated a panel entitled “Encounters with SamulNori” at the International SamulNori Symposium. In a public interview format, I directed questions to Suzanna Samstag, Kim Rihae (Kim Duk Soo’s wife), and Kim Dong-won. The contents of the interviews and discussion were transcribed by Yeo SangBum [Yö Sangböm] and incorporated into a 2009 publication funded in part by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism. See SamulNori Hanullim, *SamulNori: Commemoration of SamulNori’s 30th Anniversary*, 211.

¹⁴ Suzanna Samstag, pers. comm.

recounted that the music “literally tore through my body.”¹⁵ The young musicians were the members of the newly solidified SamulNori quartet—Kim Duk Soo, Kim Yong-bae, Lee Kwang Soo, and Choi Jong-sil.

Samstag noted that there was a healthy dose of competition among the musicians, who sought to prove their worth to one another. In interviews with Lee Kwang Soo and Choi Jong-sil in 2009, both mentioned that they had crossed paths with Kim Duk Soo during their childhood in the early 1960s.¹⁶ As the rising musical stars of their hometowns, each had been selected to participate as percussionists in national folk arts competitions, representing the Yesan and Samch’önp’o *nongak* teams, respectively. In his autobiography, Kim Duk Soo also mentions how he and other adults took note of the other talented musicians, especially Kim Yong-bae, who was gifted on both the *changgo* and *kkwaenggwari*.¹⁷ Even though the musicians did not know each other personally during their youth, they were certainly aware of one another prior to joining forces as a quartet.

In retrospect, Samstag admits that it was the physicality of the dancing that attracted her most to SamulNori. During her youth she was a gymnast, and she was offered college scholarships to pursue competitive gymnastics. She opted for academic studies instead, but ended up coaching the women’s gymnastics team at Georgetown. After seeing SamulNori perform, Samstag was so enchanted that she was determined to try to learn the music. Since she had already studied *t’alch’um* (Korean masked dance), she believed she could approach the music of SamulNori through her background in dance and gymnastics.

¹⁵ Lee, “An Expatriate’s Life in Korea: A Profile of Suzanna Samstag Oh,” 37.

¹⁶ Transcribed interviews with Lee Kwang Soo and Choi Jong-sil can be found in SamulNori Hanullim’s *SamulNori: Commemoration of SamulNori’s 30th Anniversary*. See pages 123 (Lee) and 143 (Choi).

¹⁷ Kim Duk Soo had already received notoriety as a child prodigy when he won the President’s Award at the age of seven. For his discussion of the national folk arts competitions and the national *nongak* competition, see Kim, *Gülloböl kwangdae Kim Töksu*, 59-60.

When I saw them perform, I wanted to go and learn how to play this instrument, even though previously I had never had an interest to play a musical instrument. I found out where their studio was and gathered up the courage to go there. These four guys had no interest in teaching anybody, however, especially not a foreigner who could hardly speak Korean, so they gave me the blow-off. I was determined not to give up, though. I came by all the time and attended all of their performances. I was the ultimate groupie! Finally, they conceded and let their driver teach me, and so I said okay because I just wanted to learn.

I arrived at the studio every day at 6:00 a.m., which turned into 7:00 usually, as the driver wouldn't show up for the first hour, forcing me to sit on the steps outside their rehearsal space until the guy showed up. The driver knew some of the music, but he wasn't trained and he didn't know how to teach. I tried as best I could for months and months, though, until finally I said, 'You know, why don't you give me a key and I'll come in and practice by myself until you get there.'¹⁸

Samstag was eventually allowed to practice in the small office/studio (in the A-hyŏn district) during the early mornings. In gratitude, she would tidy up the office for the quartet members. She divided her time between her studies at Seoul National University and the SamulNori studio, thanks to her newfound interest in Korean percussion. One day when the group was away on tour, Samstag took it upon herself to organize the paperwork in the office; documents and files were so entirely neglected that they overflowed out of the drawers that housed them:

First thing I did was organize all of their papers and put them in the filing cabinet. And they were like, "Oh thanks." . . . To them, it didn't really mean anything. To me, it was like, this is the key to your future—answering letters and communicating with people who are writing who want to work together. If you just tell me what you want to do, I'll type it up and send it back. Remember we were communicating at pretty basic levels for a while. But they didn't see the importance in all this correspondence yet. Then I think I realized later on, that this is how you ran a business—you had someone answering letters.¹⁹

¹⁸ Harris, *Faces of Korea*, 409–10.

¹⁹ Samstag, interview, September 6, 2009.

After SamulNori's first U.S. tour in 1982 the group began to receive correspondence from international presenters. Since the musicians were not able to read English, the letters were left unanswered. Samstag began to send typed letters in English, and soon enough it became apparent that she was acting as SamulNori's de facto manager. Had it not been for Samstag's initiative, persistence, and management acumen, it is almost certain that SamulNori would not have catapulted so quickly to international attention.

In his autobiography Kim Duk Soo paid tribute to Samstag for her decade-long involvement with the group: "She was the first person to pave the way for SamulNori's internationalization."²⁰ Samstag not only handled the daily affairs of business but also served as acting manager for all SamulNori's international and domestic performances from 1983 to 1994. As tour manager Samstag wore many hats, from overseeing the tour schedule to manning the lights at shows. When SamulNori began integrating workshops and residencies into their international tours, Samstag also served as interpreter and instructor. She was responsible for nearly all the English-language publications, from the program notes to the initial SamulNori workbooks.²¹

During her tenure SamulNori toured extensively in Japan, Europe, and the United States. The years of touring and dealing with temperamental personalities eventually took their toll, however, and she left the group in 1994. It was around this time that she was scouted for a position at *Newsweek*.

²⁰ Kim, *Gilloböl kwangdae Kim Töksu*, 190.

²¹ I provide the full citation for one of Samstag's most consulted translated works: Korean Conservatorium of Performing Arts, SamulNori Academy of Music-Kim Duk Soo, Lee Kwang Soo, Kang Min Seok, with Im Dong-Ch'ang, transcriptions and additional research/synthesis. *Korean Traditional Percussion: Samulnori Rhythm Workbook I, Basic Changgo*. Trans. Suzanna M. Samstag. Seoul: Sam-ho Music Publishing Company, 1992.

Samstag served as chief editor of *Newsweek (Korean Edition)* from 1994 to 2001 and coordinated weekly with the New York office in the planning of news coverage.

A long-term expatriate, Samstag still lives in South Korea with her two children. She is often called upon to advise on issues related to Korean music and culture. The SamulNori Hanullim organization invited her to serve as a judge during the 2008 World SamulNori competition. At the time of this writing, she is senior advisor to the president of the Daesung Group, an energy company.



Figure 4.3. Shinparam at Kyongbok Palace in Seoul, Korea, 2005.²² ©Shinparam.

SHINPARAM, UNITED STATES

Shinparam identifies itself as a “traditional drumming group of the Korean American community in the Twin Cities” and as a group that plays “*p’ungmul* on the prairie.”²³ The group is a

²² From left to right: Sam Breitner, Emma Wunrow, Jennifer Arndt, Sarah Lee, Madeleine Wunrow, Han Yong Wunrow, Martha Vickery, Shirley Sailors, and Stephen Wunrow.

²³ Shinparam, “About Shinparam,” <http://shinparam.org/zbxe/Intro> (accessed June 9, 2010).

diverse mix of second-generation Korean Americans, Korean adoptees, adoptive parents, international Korean students, and non-Koreans with an avid interest in Korean drumming. Shinparam was founded in 2004, partly as a publicity and outreach project of the *Korean Quarterly* newspaper, a publication that services the interests of the Korean American and Korean adoptee communities of the Twin Cities and the upper Midwest. Sarah Lee, the group's first leader (2004–2006), chose to render the English translation of the group's name Shinparam in the poetically evocative phrase "wind of inspiration."²⁴

Shinparam's Facebook group page states that their goals are to "develop members' proficiency in the tradition of *poongmulnori* (marching and dance choreography with drumming) and the more modern *samulnori* (a seated concert-style of traditional drumming)."²⁵ Membership is open to anyone (teens and adults) with an interest in Korean percussion. As of June 2010 there were fifteen regular members. Since its inception, the group has had two leaders, Sarah Lee and Sam Sangho Kim. Both Lee and Kim previously learned selected aspects of the *p'ungmul* and *samulnori* genres in Chicago and South Korea, respectively, and were graduate students at the University of Minnesota at the time of their involvement with Shinparam. Kim is the leader of the group in 2012.

The person most responsible for spearheading the group in its initial configuration, however, is Martha Vickery. She and her husband, Stephen Wunrow, have three children, two of whom are adopted from South Korea. Since 1997 Vickery and Wunrow have published the *Korean Quarterly*, a well-distributed newspaper that includes stories on Korea and Korean American-related issues, book and film

²⁴ As in many *samulnori* and *p'ungmul* groups based in Korea and in other countries, the group's name takes on significance and is often imbued with several semantic meanings that operate across different linguistic domains. The name Shinparam is derived from the Sino-Korean cognate *sin* (신, 神, spirit) and the Korean term *param* (바람, wind). *Param* is a play on the *p'ung* of *p'ungmul*, which is the Sino-Korean translation for "wind." In combination, the two terms foster a connection to traditional Korean drumming forms and construct evocative imagery that aligns with both ancient and local Korean conceptualizations of nature's kinship with the spiritual world. See Martha Vickery, "Pulse of the Earth," 74.

²⁵ Shinparam, Korean Traditional Drumming Troupe in Twin Cities Facebook Group, <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=133749465104> (accessed January 12, 2012).

reviews, photo essays, and resource and event listings for the Korean American and Korean adoptee communities. Vickery writes a majority of the feature stories and oversees the content of each issue, with issues averaging between ninety and a hundred pages. Wunrow serves as the publisher, photographer, designer, and director of advertising. Both had already been acquainted with Korean percussion music through SamulNori recordings they had acquired over the years. Vickery and Wunrow toyed with the idea of starting up a group to “create interest in and appreciation of Korean traditional drumming and to publicize *Korean Quarterly* newspaper at events in the community.”²⁶

Vickery took her family to see a SamulNori Hanullim performance (featuring Kim Duk Soo) at Saint John’s University on January 31, 2004.²⁷ According to Vickery, she was surprised to find that the auditorium was “jam-packed” even in the midst of a true Minnesotan blizzard.²⁸ The performance was “fabulous” and sparked a renewed interest in the community drumming group idea. After SamulNori Hanullim’s performance, Vickery began actively recruiting members for a start-up Korean percussion ensemble. She persuaded Sarah Lee, then a first year medical student at the University of Minnesota, to lead the group in the fall of 2004. The Korean Institute of Minnesota (KIM) lent the group *samulnori* instruments and costumes and also provided a rehearsal space.²⁹ By the fall of 2004 Shinparam had eight regular members.

²⁶ Shinparam, “Short History,” World SamulNori Festival board, http://www.samulfestival.com/board/board_read.asp?bbs=bbs_contest&attr=41-15-0-0-2 (accessed December 14, 2008).

²⁷ The performance at Saint John’s University marked the kick-off to SamulNori Hanullim’s 2004 U.S. tour. I worked closely in 2003 with Joo Jay-youn (SamulNori Hanullim’s managing director) and Rob Robbins (formerly of Herbert Barrett Management) to plan and see through the logistics of the month-long 2004 U.S. tour. Sebastian Wang served as the tour manager for the 2004 tour.

²⁸ Martha Vickery, Skype interview, June 11, 2009.

²⁹ The Korean Institute of Minnesota received the set of instruments and costumes through a grant administered by the Overseas Koreans Foundation (OKF), an affiliate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. For several years the OKF earmarked funds for a special “*samulnori* instrument” grant program for interested *samulnori* groups and Korean cultural organizations outside Korea. The grants were designed to support the global transmission of Korean music.

A second-generation Korean American, Sarah Lee (b. 1979) taught the group of beginners based on what she had learned as a member of the Loose Roots Korean American drumming group at the University of Chicago (1997–2001).³⁰ According to Vickery, when Lee first started teaching the group she “was making up her own pieces, stringing beats together, just to teach us beats and transitions.”³¹ Lee often consulted with Paul Namhoon Kim, a member of the Chicago-based IlGwaNori drumming troupe (Shinparam’s mentor group of sorts) as to what to teach the Minnesota group next. By the summer of 2005 Shinparam group had already performed at three local events: a Lunar New Year’s event for the Korean School (Korean Institute of Minnesota) in February 2005, a multi-cultural celebration held at the University of Minnesota Medical School benefitting the Native American free clinic in Minneapolis, and the *Korean Quarterly* fundraiser and community outreach event, “Spring Thing,” held on April 30, 2005.³²

In June of 2005, upon a nomination by the author, the Shinparam group was selected to participate in the fourteenth annual SamulNori Gyorugi [Kyörugi] (SamulNori competition and festival) in Puyö, South Korea.³³ The Shinparam team had nine members represent the group in Korea (see Figure 4.3). The members who traveled to Korea during the last week of September 2005 were Jennifer Arndt, Sam Breitner, Sarah Lee, Shirley Sailors, Martha Vickery, and Emma, Madeleine, Han Yong and

³⁰ Sarah Lee, pers. comm.

³¹ Vickery interview, June 11, 2009.

³² Martha Vickery, e-mail message to author, May 20, 2005.

³³ Although my tenure as overseas coordinator for SamulNori Hanullim/Nanjang Culture had officially ended in 2004, I still occasionally assisted in various events. In this case I was asked by Joo Jay-youn to recommend a *samulnori* team from the United States to participate in the 2005 festival. Because of my connections with the Korean adoptee community, I had become acquainted with Stephen Wunrow when I was asked to write an article on SamulNori for the *Korean Quarterly* in 2003. In August 2004 I helped arrange a visit for Wunrow and *Korean Quarterly* reporter Kyong Halverson at the SamulNori Hanullim Puyö Educational Institute. In the meantime I became aware of the Shinparam group and thought that it would be a good opportunity for the group to participate in the SamulNori festival, despite their fledgling status.

Stephen Wunrow. At sixty, Sailors, a Euro-American with connections in the Korean community, was the eldest member of the group; at ten years old, Han Yong Wunrow, Vickery and Wunrow's adopted son from Korea, was the youngest. Kyung Un Ro (No Kyöngün), a native Korean who had been an exchange student staying at the Wunrows' home earlier in 2005, joined the group when they arrived in Puyö.

Although the team was inexperienced and somewhat green for the competition, they attracted a great deal of publicity from Korean media outlets (e.g., KBS TV, *Korea Herald*, *Joongang Ilbo*, and Arirang TV). Much was made of the group's diversity in terms of ethnic background and age.



Figure 4.4. Shinparam featured on Arirang TV in 2005. Source: Arirang.

Vickery mentioned in an interview I conducted with her: “We got a lot of press that time, because we had children in our group, and children who were pretty good, you know, for just being Americans and I mean, everybody’s kind of the same level, you know—not very good, but everybody kind of focused on the kids . . . adopted Koreans and Korean Americans and Caucasians in the group together was kind of a media draw.”³⁴

³⁴ Vickery interview, June 11, 2009.

Attendance at the 2005 SamulNori Gyorugi was an eye-opening experience for the group. In a blog entry published by *Korean Quarterly*, Sarah Lee chronicled some of these revelations.

We were all so nervous, since our team is only a year old, and others have been together for six or more years. I was especially stressed, because as the teacher and choreographer, I knew that not every bit of knowledge I had passed on to my team members was traditionally accurate, in terms of what has been passed from one drummer to the next in the 5,000 years of Korean history. After all, my drumming skills had been thoroughly filtered through Korean American ears and minds before being taught to me. I had never been taught by the Korean masters. . . . I was strangely comforted talking to other international teams who are also struggling without access to a bona fide Korean drumming expert. . . . I want our beats to be in synch with others across the world so we can join together, so we must learn the textbook-traditional way. However, I agree with a Korean German born fellow drummer, that it is futile (and perhaps vain) to seek the pure Korean way for our groups. Our group, Shinparam, will always have a [sic] undeniable American flavor, from how we move when dancing with our drums to the arrangement of the drumming beats. The way one plays Korean drums, reveals a lot about one's personality, so I'm glad that our music is a reflection of who we are. I came back with enough memories for a couple lifetimes, strong beats in my heart, and not just a new perspective on drumming, but on life in general. I will take Duk Soo Kim's [Kim Duk Soo] advice, and not to strive only for correctness but to inspire and give shinparam to those around me.³⁵

Vickery also remarked that it was exciting to meet other Korean and foreign *samulnori* groups at the festival and to be part of a larger international *samulnori* community. She profiled several of the groups in the Winter 2005–2006 issue of the *Korean Quarterly* newspaper.

At the beginning of 2006 the leadership of the group transitioned from Sarah Lee to Sam Sangho Kim (b. 1975). Lee was no longer able to balance the duties of leading the group with her obligations as a medical student. A native Korean, Kim had joined Shinparam during the fall semester of 2005, after coming to the United States to begin a doctoral program in electrical engineering at the University of Minnesota. Kim's experiences in amateur drumming circles in Korea gave him the requisite skills to

³⁵ Sarah Lee, quoted in Vickery, "Pulse of the Earth," 75–76.

serve as the next teacher for the group.³⁶ During his undergraduate career at Pusan National University he had been part of a drumming circle and trained at transmission camps (called *chönsu*) that specialized in “Pusan Nongak” (*p’ungmul* from the Pusan area). As part of his required two-year military service to the Republic of Korea, he was also recruited to perform as a percussionist in the *munhwa sönchöndae* (문화선전대, cultural propaganda units).³⁷

Upon first seeing the Shinparam group rehearse, Kim felt a strong desire to assist the group in becoming more technically proficient at drumming. Unlike Lee, Kim mainly taught from SamulNori’s set of notation workbooks that the group had purchased during their trip to Korea. They learned many of the standard items of the *samulnori* repertoire: “Yöngnam samulnori,” “Uttari p’ungmul,” “Söl changgo karak,” and “Samdo samulnori.” Kim maintains the Shinparam website and uploads audio recordings of the *samulnori* pieces and YouTube clips of Shinparam’s performances.

During their trip to Puyö in September–October 2005, Shinparam also met Kim Dong-won [Kim Tongwön], SamulNori Hanullim’s former education director.³⁸ The following year Kim was invited by Vickery to lead drumming workshops for the group in Minnesota. He returned in 2007 to perform for *Korean Quarterly*’s tenth anniversary event and has maintained a connection with the group. Individual members have also traveled to Korea for short-term to long-term stays, most often combining

³⁶ Sam Sangho Kim, Skype interview, June 28, 2010.

³⁷ Sam Sangho Kim mentioned that these *samulnori* performances by the ROK army’s *mun-sön-dae* were broadcast on loudspeakers at strategic locations along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The loud and boisterous performances of Korean percussion could easily be heard on the North Korean side. According to Kim, the broadcasts were part of a strategic military operation akin to a version of psychological warfare. Other Korean males that I have spoken with (who had some kind of training in *kugak*) have discussed their participation in these kind of cultural propaganda units, designed to demonstrate: 1) a sense of unified, collective energy; 2) an atmosphere of excitement and fun that could only be had south of the DMZ; 3) South Korea’s cultural superiority over the north.

³⁸ Kim Dong-won is a recurring figure in this dissertation. I discuss Kim’s involvement as an activist in the democratization movement in chapter 2. Later, he becomes associated with SamulNori Hanullim as part of their Research and Educational division. He has also led numerous workshops and residencies on *samulnori* outside of Korea.

language study with lessons in Korean drumming.³⁹ Shinparam has also expanded its repertoire to include more *p'ungmul* (in their word, “standing”) set pieces such as “P'ungnyu kut.”

Since 2006 Shinparam has maintained an active performing schedule, with an average of one performance a month. According to Sam Sangho Kim, the group is now well known in the Twin Cities area and receives regular requests to perform at events and festivals. In 2008 they were invited for the second time to participate in the World SamulNori Festival in Puyŏ, South Korea.



Figure 4.5. Swissamul at the World SamulNori Festival in Puyŏ, South Korea⁴⁰
Photograph by author.

SWISSAMUL, SWITZERLAND

³⁹ Former and current Shinparam members Lia Bengston, Nik Nadeau, and Shirley Sailors have all spent time in Korea, studying either *samulnori* or *p'ungmul*.

⁴⁰ From left to right: Hildegard Eichmann, Suzanne Nketia, Nathalie Baumann, Bettina Marugg, and Hendrikje Lange.

Swissamul is an all-female group based in Basel, Switzerland. They describe themselves as an “ensemble of drummers . . . dedicated to the fiery energy and vibrant dynamism of Korean drum music known as ‘SamulNori.’”⁴¹ The members are all Swiss nationals and range in age from forty to fifty-eight. Swissamul can be considered a musical community of affinity, in that none of the members share ethnic ties to Korea.⁴² Their connection to Korea was cultivated primarily through their fascination with Korean percussion. As of 2008 the members included group leader Suzanne Nketia, Hendrikje Lange, Hildegard Eichmann, Bettina Marugg, Nathalie Baumann, and Gudrun Emminger. As a group, Swissamul has performed in Korea three times, at the SamulNori Gyorugi competition and festival in 2002, 2005, and 2008. All members of Swissamul have regularly participated in *samulnori* workshops organized by Nketia and taught by Kim Dong-won, former education director at SamulNori Hanullim, at the Musik-Akademie Basel. Most members have also made numerous trips to Korea to study at the SamulNori Hanullim Puyö Educational Institute.

Swissamul closely aligns itself with the *samulnori* genre. This group having only five to six regular members, the *samulnori* repertory is well suited to them, as it only requires a minimum of four performers on four different percussion instruments. Nketia typically plays the lead *kkwaenggwari* part, as she has the longest exposure to *samulnori*. Although all members are proficient at playing the *changgo*, each specializes in one instrument. The group’s website lists the following pieces as part of their repertory: “Yöngnam nongak,” “Uttari p’ungmul,” and “Söl changgo karak.” Two additional “pieces,”

⁴¹ Suzanne Nketia, “Swissamul,” <http://www.suzanne-nketia.ch/swissamul.html> (accessed May 11, 2010).

⁴² I draw here from Kay Kaufman Shelemay’s 2011 article on musical communities. Shelemay defines a musical community of affinity as one that “emerges first and foremost from individual preferences, quickly followed by a desire for social proximity or association with others equally enamored.” (Shelemay, “Musical Communities,” 373). For a basic description of the three types of musical communities in Shelemay’s typology (communities of affinity, descent, and dissent), see Shelemay, “Musical Communities.” (As in other musical communities that shares processes of affinity, gender also plays an interesting role in these international *samulnori* teams.)

“P’ilbong nongak” and “Kyŏnggi dodang kut,” from the *p’ungmul* and *musok* (shamanic) traditions, are also part of Swissamul’s repertoire.⁴³ According to Lange, Swissamul considers their primary teacher to be Kim Dong-won, who has traveled yearly to Basel to lead week-long *samulnori* workshops since 1996.

Swissamul’s somewhat reluctant leader, Suzanne Nketia has led a life dedicated to dance and music. Originally trained as a classical ballet dancer, Nketia moved to London in her twenties in order to “find a dance which touch[ed] her soul.”⁴⁴ There she became acquainted with a pan-African dance troupe and began to take lessons in various styles of West African dance (e.g., Ga, Ashanti, and Ewe). Nketia eventually transitioned from ballet to performing West African dance and spent over twenty years becoming immersed in Ghanaian dance and its culture.⁴⁵ In the late 1980s Nketia was first exposed to the sounds of Korean percussion through a rhythm-based workshop led by musician Reinhard Flatischler, creator of the TakeTiNa rhythm process.⁴⁶ In an interview with the author, Nketia reflected on her point of entry into Korean percussion (*vis-à-vis* Flatischler) that paved the way for her interest in the study of rhythm: “He developed a system of teaching rhythm—which he had experienced in different cultures—like India, Korea, Brazil, or Cuba, I don’t know. The body and the voice are connected. And for me, it was a good method to learn rhythm in a deeper way.”⁴⁷

⁴³ As “P’ilbong nongak” represents a constellation of various rhythmic patterns configured and ordered into large modules or sets, it is likely that this is more a sample of rhythms from the (Imsil) P’ilbong *nongak* tradition.

⁴⁴ Suzanne Nketia, Skype interview, August 11, 2009.

⁴⁵ Nketia’s first husband (now deceased) was a musician and dancer from Akan.

⁴⁶ Flatischler studied various forms of percussion in India, Korea, Cuba, and Brazil and went on to develop the TakeTiNa Rhythm Process in 1970. The TakeTiNa method is a pedagogical method that “creates rhythm consciousness through the interaction of feet, hands, and voice” (see Flatischler, *The Forgotten Power of Rhythm*, 145). Since the 1970s Flatischler has led workshops in Europe and the United States on the TakeTiNa Process. He typically incorporates into his workshops the Korean hourglass-shaped drum (*changgo*) and variations on Korean rhythmic patterns. For further information, see Flatischler’s website, <http://www.taketina.com> (accessed November 2, 2010).

⁴⁷ Nketia interview, August 11, 2009.

But it was after a 1990 SamulNori performance that Nketia attended at the Mühle Hunziken in Rubingen, Switzerland, that she felt inexplicably moved and compelled to learn more about the Korean percussion genre.⁴⁸ Members Kim Duk Soo, Lee Kwang Soo, Choi Jong-sil, and Kang Min-Seok [Kang Minsök] (who replaced Kim Yong-bae in 1984) performed at this concert with the jazz group Red Sun as part of a three-week Red Sun/SamulNori European tour.⁴⁹ Nketia was first and foremost impressed that the performers were both expert musicians and dancers. She stated in an interview, “The music touched me differently. Most of the European drummers— they don’t have *hohŭp*.⁵⁰ And African drummers, they have *hohŭp*, in another way. And that it [*hohŭp*] was taught. I learned it, and this impressed me very deeply. And I think this was the reason—why *samulnori* could take me.”⁵¹

When an opportunity to travel to Seoul presented itself in May 1991 to her partner, Michael Huber, Nketia decided to accompany him as a way to try and meet with the SamulNori group.⁵² Nketia

⁴⁸ SamulNori, *SamulNori/10 Years*, loose-leaf insert titled “1990 SamulNori International and Domestic Performances,” 2.

⁴⁹ The Red Sun jazz group was born out of an equally meaningful encounter between SamulNori and Austrian saxophonist Wolfgang Puschnig in 1987, at the Megadrum Festival organized by Reinhard Flatischler. For a concise summary of the jazz group’s formation and long-term collaboration with SamulNori, see Hesselink, “East-West Encounters in the Nanjang,” in *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*, 110–11. It is important to point out that Red Sun has had a fluid membership over time and in different locations. Therefore different musicians have appeared as part of Red Sun in performances and recordings issued on European and Korean labels. When I worked for SamulNori Hanullim in 2003, Red Sun was invited to perform for SamulNori’s 25th anniversary concerts at Ho-am Art Hall in Seoul. This was when I first met Wolfgang Puschnig, jazz vocalist Linda Sharrock (Puschnig’s former partner and musical collaborator), bassist Jamaaladeen Tacuma, and guitarist Rick Iannaccone. In August 2010, during a follow-up research trip to Korea, I had the pleasure of meeting Red Sun once again—this time with a slightly different configuration of Puschnig, Tacuma, and an Armenian jazz pianist named Karen Asatrian. Despite all the changes over the years, Puschnig and Tacuma have remained fixtures in the group.

⁵⁰ *Hohŭp* (호흡/呼吸) is a Sino-Korean term that translates into “breath.” It is an important concept in Korean folk music and dance and a cornerstone of SamulNori’s pedagogical system. *Hohŭp* is a concept that invokes the connection between the breath, movement, rhythm, and the playing of music. If one has a good sense of *hohŭp*, there is a natural alignment between the mind, the body, and the music. To see how this concept is represented in SamulNori’s literature (both textually and with illustrations), see Korean Conservatorium of Performing Arts, *SamulNori: Changgo Fundamentals*, 20–21.

⁵¹ Nketia interview, August 11, 2009.

⁵² Huber is a puppeteer and was invited to participate in the week-long International Puppet Festival in Korea in 1991 (Rubin, *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, 271).

inquired with SamulNori's manager at the time, Suzanna Samstag, about the possibility of visiting the SamulNori rehearsal space. Samstag was able to arrange for Nketia to sit in on rehearsals and lessons at the Sinch'on Nanjang Studio in northern Seoul. For two weeks she took lessons from Im Dong-ch'ang [Im Tongch'ang] and Kim Dong-won, and she also joined in on group lessons that were often led directly by Kim Duk Soo and Lee Kwang Soo.⁵³ In many ways, this experience at the Sinch'on Nanjang planted the seeds of her long-standing relationship with the SamulNori community.

Despite having a difficult experience acclimating to life in Seoul, Nketia decided to continue pursuing her interest in Korean drumming by attending a SamulNori workshop in Berlin in April 1992.⁵⁴ The workshop was led by Kim Duk Soo, Lee Kwang Soo, Choi Jong-sil, and Kang Min-seok, assisted by Suzanna Samstag. The quartet took note of Nketia's enthusiasm and invited her to participate in the SamulNori Gyorugi competition and festival in 1993. Initially turned off by the idea of participating as a solo performer in a competition, she was reassured by Suzanna Samstag that the festival would be "great fun" and was encouraged to attend. The 1993 Gyorugi was held in the large venue of the Chamsil Olympic Stadium, built for the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics. Nketia performed the "Söl changgo karak" as a solo *changgo* player in the foreigner's category and took second place in the competition.

After learning that SamulNori was slated to appear at a festival in Geneva the following year (1994), Nketia contacted the organizer and arranged to pick up the group afterwards. She organized a *samulnori* workshop for them in Liestal and had the four men stay at her own home. She also enlisted

⁵³ Pianist and composer Im Dong-ch'ang was a frequent visitor at the Nanjang Studio in S'inchon. Although trained in Western music, Im had a burgeoning interest in (and good ear for) traditional Korean music and became quite skilled at learning the rhythms that the SamulNori quartet played in their compositions. As discussed in Chapter 3, Im was largely responsible for transcribing the *samulnori* rhythms into notational form. Nketia noted that Lee Kwang Soo was the first to show her how use the *sangmo* (hat with long white streamer that is activated through body movements).

⁵⁴ SamulNori, *SamulNori/10 Years*, loose-leaf insert titled "1990 SamulNori International and Domestic Performances," 11; Nketia interview, August 11, 2009.

help from the wife of the president of the Society for the Korean Community of Switzerland to prepare Korean meals for the group. Nketia admitted that this invitation to SamulNori was both a gesture of appreciation for her experience at the festival and also a way to continue taking lessons. In 1995 she organized a similar week-long workshop for the group, and in 1996 Kim Dong-won started to come yearly to Basel to serve as sole instructor for the *samulnori* workshops at the Musik-Akademie Basel. By attending the yearly workshops in Berlin (largely attended by members of the Korean German community) and organizing her own in Basel, Nketia was able to patch together lessons for herself in Europe during the mid-1990s.⁵⁵ Soon, others began to take note.

Hendrikje Lange (b. 1969) inquired about taking *changgo* lessons from Nketia after hearing her perform in a workshop in 1995. Lange was, in effect, Nketia's first "student." Lange's first encounter with a live performance of *samulnori* was in 1996, when the Samul GwangDae team (Park An-ji, Shin Chan-sun, Jang Hyun-jin, and Kim Han-bok) performed at a music festival in Basel.⁵⁶ In an interview with the author, she reflected on this life-changing experience:

It was really like, how can I say, like a shock. Like an earthquake, when I saw them. I could really never imagine something like that existing of this world. So this was actually the moment when I really took a very strong position; I will go to Korea and I really want to learn *changgo*. This is the only thing I really want to learn. Because when I saw this performance I was really crying. I was so touched by the beauty and power. . . . I remember the singing of Park An-ji. Especially his singing was something that was very deeply touching for me . . . but it was immediately touching my heart directly, even though I didn't understand

⁵⁵ Nketia interview, August 11, 2009. See also Vickery, "Beat of Their Own Drummers," 76–77.

⁵⁶ The Samul GwangDae [Samul Kwangdae] team was one of the first groups to apprentice under the SamulNori quartet at the Sinch'on Nanjang studio in the early 1990s. Park An-ji [Pak Anji], Shin Chan-sun [Sin Ch'ansŏn], Jang Hyun-jin [Chang Hyŏnjin], and Kim Han-bok [Kim Hanbok] were all graduates of the same high school in Kŭmsan and moved to Seoul upon graduation. The GwangDae team performed extensively with Kim Duk Soo as part of the SamulNori Hanullim organization from 1993 to 2007. The group now performs as an independent *samulnori* quartet within and outside of Korea.

what it was about. But I felt immediately it was a prayer song.⁵⁷

Lange first traveled to Korea with Nketia in 1999 to perform as part of the SwiKo trio at the Seoul Drum Festival and SamulNori Gyorugi competition and festival. Hildegard Eichmann (b. 1960) and Bettina Marugg (b. 1966) both received certification in TakeTiNa instruction and were participants in the 1996 *samulnori* workshop that Nketia organized in Basel. They have been members of Swissamul since 2002. Nathalie Baumann (b. 1970), a research associate with training in urban ecology and anthropology, first began taking lessons in 2000 from Kim Dong-won and Nketia. Her first trip to Korea was in 2008.

Swissamul's members have traveled to Korea together and individually, in order to study at the SamulNori Hanullim Puyŏ Educational Institute (사물놀이한울림부여교육원). Their last trip to Korea as a group was in 2008, in order to attend the World SamulNori Festival in Puyŏ. In the summer of 2009, for instance, when I was finishing my field research, Eichmann and Marugg studied for a few weeks in Puyŏ. Marugg and Lange have also forged close ties with the Kŭmsan Buddhist Temple in Kimje and often combine *samulnori* study with meditation retreats. At the time of this writing, Swissamul's most recent endeavor was in April 2010. Together with Kim Dong-won, they performed a concert at the Musik-Akademie Basel entitled "Korean Music between Tradition and Modernity," parts of which can be viewed on YouTube.⁵⁸

As of 2010 Swissamul's membership changed when Hendrikje Lange left her job as a physical therapist in Basel and relocated to Seoul in order to pursue further studies in Korean percussion. Lange

⁵⁷ Hendrikje Lange, Skype interview, August 14, 2009. The prayer song that Lange heard performed by Park An-ji is the *pinari*. The *pinari* will be discussed in chapter 5: Transnational *Samulnori* and the Politics of Place.

⁵⁸ "05 Gyonggi Dodang Gut—Traditional—Kim Dong-Won and Swissamul," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jU02Y1uBSR0> (accessed July 18, 2010).

started to train intensively at the SamulNori Hanullim Puyŏ Educational Institute in the fall of 2010 and began the arduous process of preparing for the entrance audition to a two-year master's program in Korean performing arts. In January 2012 Lange was admitted into the Korean National University of the Arts (KNUA), becoming the first non-Korean to be accepted into a Korean music program through a standard admissions process. Lange's progression has caught the attention of the Korean media; she was recently featured in a segment on SBS television during their Lunar New Year's special newscast.⁵⁹



Figure 4.6. Hendrikje Lange featured on a segment titled “A Life Transformed by Samulnori,” (January 23, 2012) Source: SBS.

When I interviewed Nketia in 2009, one year after Swissamul was awarded first prize at the World SamulNori Festival, she was content with the current members of the group, who were “willing to go deeper into the culture and the music.”⁶⁰ Lange has certainly followed through on this, and in many ways her story remains a work unfolding by the day. It is clear, however, that Nketia's Swissamul group has provided a necessary base for its members to explore Korean percussion traditions further.

⁵⁹ Sarah Kim, “Swiss Woman Marches to Beat of Own Drum,” *Korea Joongang Daily*, February 7, 2012, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joinsmsn.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2948029&cloc=joongang> (accessed Feb. 11, 2012).

⁶⁰ Nketia interview, August 11, 2009.



Figure 4.7. Canto del Cielo members at the World SamulNori Festival in Puyö.⁶¹
Photograph by author.

CANTO DEL CIELO, MEXICO

With the exception of Ch'oe Namyun, Canto del Cielo is a *samulnori* ensemble composed of Mexican nationals. To date they are the first all-Mexican *samulnori* team to have formed. Similar to Swissamul, Canto del Cielo (Song of Heaven) is a musical community of affinity. Unlike the Swiss group, however, the members of the Mexican group were first drawn to Korean culture through their zeal and passion for South Korean dramas that were broadcast on Mexican television in the mid-2000s. Ranging in age from twenty to thirty-five, many of the female members of Canto del Cielo are diehard fans of Korean male actors who starred in Korean melodramas that became associated with the Hallyu

⁶¹ From top left to right: Wendy Rodríguez Muñoz, Martha Bermúdez Ortiz, Donaji Hernández Vélez, Bárbara Cario Martínez, and Ch'oe Namyun, From bottom left to right: Aideé Santillan Moreno, Mariana Campos Pérez, Viridiana Sánchez Zaragoza, and Ariadna Ramírez Lealde.

(frequently coined as the “Korean Wave”) phenomenon.⁶² Viridiana Sánchez Zaragoza (b. 1990), for instance, is president of the Kwon Sang-woo [Kwŏn Sang’u] Mexican Fanclub, and Wendy Rodriguez Munoz (b. 1975) serves as president of the Jang Dong-gun [Chang Tonggŏn] Fanclub while also overseeing thirteen Mexican-based Hallyu fanclubs.⁶³ The dramas (and their leading male heartthrobs) gradually piqued the members’ curiosity about Korean culture and the Korean language.⁶⁴ Many turned to the Centro Cultural Coreano en México (hereafter referred to as the CCC) in Mexico City as a place to take Korean language classes and learn more about Korean culture. It was at the CCC that they were first introduced to the sights and sounds of Korean percussion music by way of a *samulnori* group (composed solely of ethnic Koreans) who practiced at the center.⁶⁵ The CCC is housed in a modest building in the Zona Rosa district that features an office and rooms used as classrooms for language courses.⁶⁶ Instruction is offered in both Korean and Spanish languages. Korean students come to learn

⁶² In 2003 the broadcasting of the Korean melodrama “Winter Sonata” on NHK television in Japan (known as “Fuyu no Sonata”: 冬のソナタ) led to popularity of unprecedented proportions. The drama’s male lead, Bae Yong-joon [Pae Yongchun], became a regional superstar and an object of affection for a demographic of infatuated middle-aged women in Japan. Bae was even bestowed with the high honorific title of Yon-sama (ヨン様) by his adoring fans and the Japanese media. The unexpected hit in Japan (which impacted the Korean economy through a surge in Hallyu tourism and Hallyu-related spending) was a catalyst in the aggressive exporting of Korean dramas and films during the mid-2000s. The Hallyu “market” originally broadcast dramas and movies in East and Southeast Asia but has since expanded to the Middle East and South America.

⁶³ Wendy Rodríguez Muñoz, pers. comm; see also “Mexico Hallyu (Korean Wave), Already on the Rise,” Asian Fanatics Forum, February 24, 2007, <http://asianfanatics.net/forum/topic/372908-mexico-hallyu-korean-wave-already-on-the-rise/> (accessed July 29, 2011).

⁶⁴ *All about Eve* (MBC, 2000), starring Jang Dong-gun, was one of the first Korean dramas to be broadcast in Mexico with Spanish subtitles in the early 2000s. See Kim Chŏngsŏp “Mexico chŏlmünidŭl Hallyu-wa yŏlae chung” [Mexican Youths Crazy for Hallyu], *The Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 28, 2005. http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=200507280758551&code=960801 (accessed Feb. 8, 2012).

⁶⁵ I visited the CCC in Mexico City in November 2009 but was unable to meet the *samulnori* group composed of ethnic Koreans. I did, however, meet with Ch’oe Namyun and several members of the Canto del Cielo group.

⁶⁶ The Zona Rosa district is home to a small but distinct “Koreatown.” Many Korean restaurants and businesses are located on Florencia Street.

Spanish, and Mexican natives register to learn Korean.⁶⁷ The center also offers classes in Korean *puch'ae ch'um* (Korean fan dance) and *t'alch'um* (Korean masked dance); many of Canto del Cielo's members have taken classes in the Korean fan dance (see Figure 4.8).⁶⁸



Figure 4.8. Korean *t'alch'um* masks hang next to the decorations used for the Mexican day of the dead, at the Centro Cultural Coreano en México. Photograph by author.

In July 2007 a week-long *samulnori* workshop was held at the CCC that attracted several Mexican participants. Lee Jeong-woo [Yi Chǒng'u], an artist formerly affiliated with the SamulNori Hanullim troupe, was sent by the SamulNori office in Seoul to lead the workshop. Since the workshop participants had never played Korean percussion instruments before, Lee was charged with the task of beginning from square one. Participants learned fundamental playing techniques, from the holding of sticks to the basic *hwimori* (duple meter) rhythmic pattern.

⁶⁷ Ch'oe Namyun, Skype interview, July 15, 2010.

⁶⁸ Wendy Rodríguez Muñoz, pers. comm.



Figure 4.9. Lee Jeong-woo [Yi Chǒng'u] teaching students the *hwimori* rhythmic pattern at the CCC workshop in 2007. ©Centro Cultural Coreano en México

According to Viridiana Sánchez Zaragoza, the workshop was a great success and spurred a general curiosity and interest in the *samulnori* genre. Wendy Rodríguez Muñoz, an active member at the CCC, then spearheaded efforts to form a *samulnori* group from among workshop participants.⁶⁹ She coined the group's name, Canto del Cielo, which she translated into Korean as “Hanul Sori” [Hanül Sori] (Song of the Sky).⁷⁰ Since a rehearsal space was already available at the CCC, Rodríguez merely needed to ensure membership and a teacher who was willing and able to lead the group. Some workshop participants, such as Aideé Santillan Moreno, for instance, had already been involved with Korean dance classes at the CCC and gravitated naturally toward the incipient *samulnori* group. For a *samulnori*

⁶⁹ Wendy Rodríguez Muñoz is currently serving as assistant to Kevin Jung, president of the CCC.

⁷⁰ Like other group names, Canto del Cielo or its Korean translation Hanul Sori invokes concepts that SamulNori has emphasized in its pedagogy. See Hesselink's discussion of cosmological didacticism in chapter four of *SamulNori: Contemporary Korean Drumming*. Note also that in the 2008 world festival program the Mexican team was incorrectly identified as MEXCOSA. According to Viridiana Sánchez Zaragoza, MEXCOSA refers to the umbrella organization that includes the CCC and its Korean performing arts groups. Canto del Cielo refers specifically to the *samulnori* ensemble. Viridiana Sánchez Zaragoza, Skype interview, June 19, 2010.

instructor to give the group lessons, Rodriguez Munoz called upon Ch'oe Namyun, a Korean émigré who lived in Paraguay for seventeen years before settling in Mexico in 2001.

Ch'oe grew up in Yongkwang, in the southern Chōlla province of Korea. As a small child he learned *p'ungmul* from elders in his village.⁷¹ He resumed music much later in his life, after he emigrated to Paraguay for business. He became affiliated with a Korean school in Paraguay and it was there that he first learned the newer genre of *samulnori*. Ch'oe continued to practice *samulnori* as a hobby and recalled that he acquired *samulnori* notation from the National Gugak Center (then National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts/국립국악원) as a way to learn a wider repertoire. After relocating to Mexico City, Ch'oe and his wife opened a Korean restaurant in the Zona Rosa district, where the CCC is also located. He teaches the Canto del Cielo group on the weekends at the center.

As of July 2010 the group's repertoire consists of the following *samulnori* pieces: "Yōngnam nongak," "Uttari p'ungmul," and a modified piece based on the *hwimori* duple rhythmic pattern, simply called "Hwimori changdan" (*Hwimori* rhythmic pattern). The group has learned parts of the "Sōl changgo karak," although it is still a work in progress. Referred to by the students as "The Professor," Ch'oe leads the group by calling out drum syllable patterns while also making use of magnified notation printed on large pieces of paper that are affixed to the wall of the studio. The members have a photocopied book of notation to consult as well, drawn largely from SamulNori's notated workbooks.

⁷¹ Ch'oe interview, July 15, 2010.

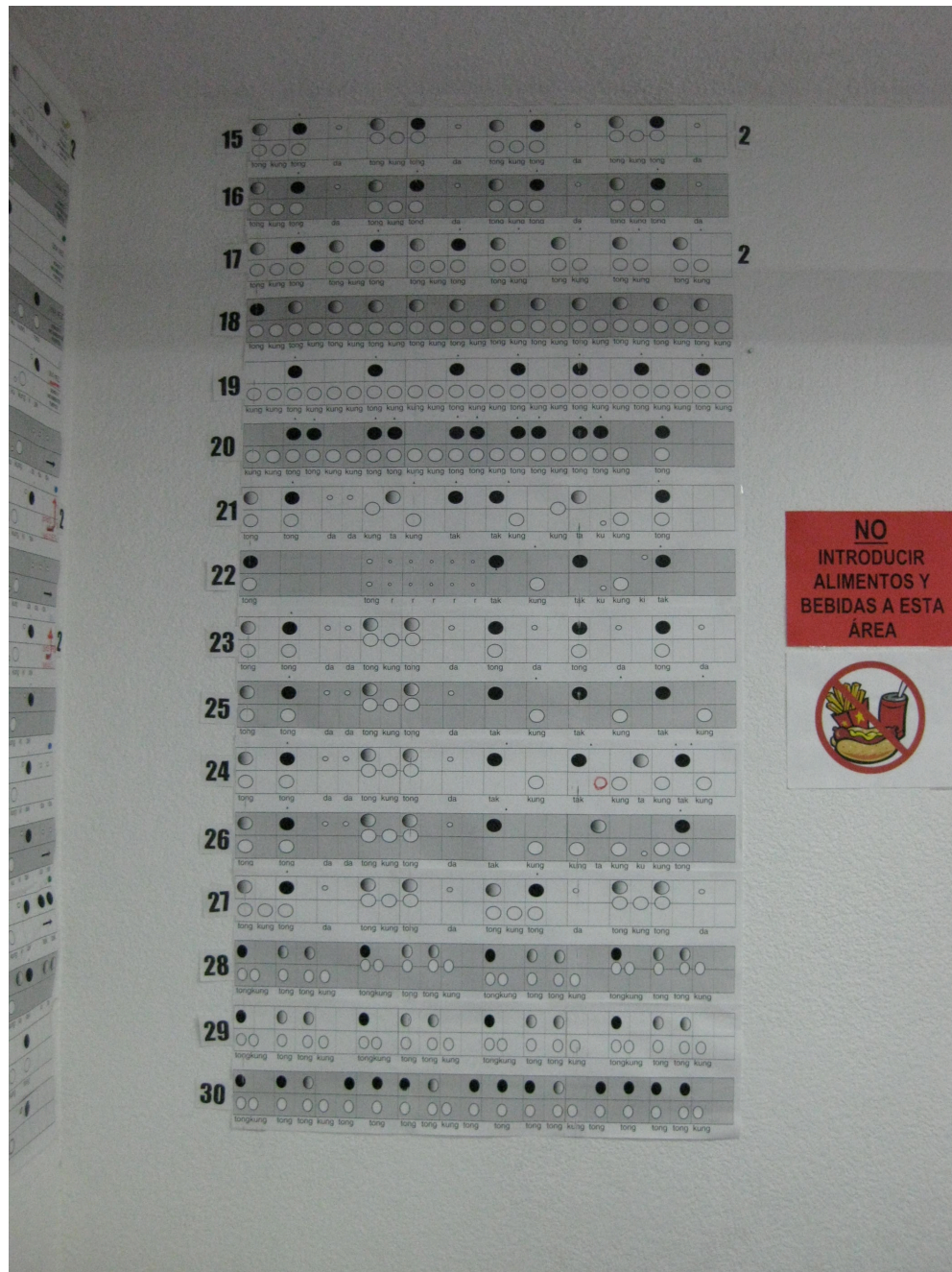


Figure 4.10. *Samulnori* notation “wallpaper” in the rehearsal studio of the CCC.
Photograph by author.

Despite being in its infancy, Canto del Cielo has already played a few high profile events in and around Mexico City. By way of the *samulnori* workshop that Lee Jeong-woo led in 2007, Canto del Cielo was nominated to participate in the World SamulNori Festival in October 2008. The participants who

traveled to Korea included eight women: Wendy Rodríguez Muñoz, Viridiana Sánchez Zaragoza, Donají Hernández Vélez, Mariana Campos Pérez, Bárbara Cario Martínez, Ariadna Ramírez Lealde, Martha Bermúdez Ortiz, and Aideé Santillan Moreno. They were accompanied by Ch'oe, who performed with the group on stage and served as a translator, and by Kevin Jung, president of the CCC. This was the first trip to Korea for all Mexican team members but Rodríguez Muñoz. In an interview, Sánchez Zaragoza noted that her first impressions of Korea were not all that surprising, since she had been exposed to many aspects of the country through her viewing of Korean dramas. The week-long stay in the somewhat placid town of Puyŏ, however, provided a more balanced picture, contrasting with the hyper-urbanized Seoul: "So the travel show[ed] me another Korea, if we can say that . . . the town and the people in the town—that was the most important."⁷²

Although there was genuine excitement among the members during their stay in Korea, the trip was not without some conflict. International travel, the mores of a foreign country, and being forced to be in close proximity with other group members for the entirety of the trip was cause for some internal friction. Sánchez Zaragoza admitted that prior to October 2008, Canto del Cielo members had never spent long periods of time with each other. In Korea, where the "group formation" was requisite at almost all times during the festival (e.g., the foreign groups were expected to eat all meals together, rehearse, and share room assignments), spending all day in close quarters with the group proved to be challenging for some members. After their return to Mexico there were some changes in membership. One member cited her obligations to family, and two others chose to drop out for more personal reasons. Despite the turnover, Canto del Cielo carried on with Rodríguez Muñoz, Sánchez Zaragoza, Cario

⁷² Sánchez Zaragoza interview, June 19, 2010.

Martínez, Ramírez Lealde, and Santillan Moreno. And as of June 2010, five new members have joined the group.



Figure 4.11. The Shinawi team from Japan at the World SamulNori Festival in 2008⁷³
©Shinawi.

SHINAWI (シナウイ), JAPAN

In 2003 Kenichi Yanaka (b. 1983) was a sophomore at Waseda University in Tokyo. During the fall of that year he was invited to participate in a cultural exchange program that was organized for college students specifically from Korea and Japan. Yanaka and twenty other Japanese students, including a woman named Yuki Goto (b. 1983), attended an all-expense-paid trip to Korea for one week. The objective of the program, sponsored by the Korean government under the rubric of the “Korea-Japan Year of Friendly Exchange,” was to learn about and experience Korean culture. For three days the Japanese college students stayed in Puyŏ, in central Korea. Here they learned about one of Korea’s most

⁷³ From left to right: Kyosuke Uchida, Mayumi Abe, Yuki Goto, Yuko Noguchi, and Kenichi Yanaka.

popular genres of Korean “traditional” music and engaged in an intensive three-day course in *samulnori* at the SamulNori Hanullim Puyŏ Educational Institute. Yanaka mentioned that this was the first time he had ever heard the *samulnori* percussion genre, let alone tried his hand at playing the percussion instruments. Among the other activities planned for the program (e.g., visiting cultural heritage sites and an elementary school), the *samulnori* intensive workshop was for him the highlight of the trip.⁷⁴

In the beginning of 2004 Yanaka began to discuss with friends the possibility of starting up a college *sa-kuru* (サークル) or group at Waseda University based on the Korean percussion genre that he had learned in Puyŏ.⁷⁵ Without any experience except for the brief three-day course at the SamulNori School in Korea, he sought help first from Kim Kyŏng-ran, a graduate of Waseda University who had formerly been a member of the university’s first *samulnori sa-kuru* five years prior. A Zainichi Korean (ethnic Korean residing in Japan), Kim had been a driving force of the group during her university years. The group eventually folded, however, after members graduated. Upon meeting Yanaka, she encouraged him to reinstate the *samulnori sa-kuru* and donated a set of instruments to him. Kim gave Yanaka basic lessons in technique and rhythmic patterns and also suggested that the new group keep the Shinawi [Sinawi] name, which refers to a type of improvisational music, drawn from Korean shamanism.⁷⁶ Kim was unable to step in as the group’s instructor, however, since she no longer resided in the area.

Thus, with a very rudimentary understanding of how to play rhythmic patterns, the Waseda University *samulnori sa-kuru* took a collaborative approach to learning how to play some of the *samulnori*

⁷⁴ Kenichi Yanaka, Skype interview, August 14, 2010.

⁷⁵ Extracurricular activities and organizations at Japanese universities are often called *sa-kuru* (サークル), which is a Japanized pronunciation of the English loan word, “circle.” In Korea the same concept applies, with the word *dongari* (동아리) designating a college group.

⁷⁶ The term/name of *sinawi* (시나위) has appeared previously before in chapter 1, with the Minsok akhoe Sinawi group (Folk music society “Sinawi”) that co-founders Kim Duk Soo and Kim Yong-bae were members of.

pieces. Yanaka recalled that over the years, members consulted the *samulnori* workbooks and listened to and viewed audiovisual materials as a way to fill in for the absence of an instructor. Just three months after its formation, the nascent group was invited to perform at an event in February 2004. Under the auspices of another Korea-Japan cultural exchange program, five members of the newly reestablished Shinawi group traveled to Korea and performed a short *samulnori* piece on the stage in front of the Migliore department store in Myōngdong. The members who traveled to Korea at that time were Mayumi Abe, Yuki Goto, Yuko Noguchi, Kyosuke Uchida and Kenichi Yanaka. Similar to the American-based Shinparam group's first appearance at the World SamulNori Festival in 2008, the experience of performing in Korea likewise gave momentum to the group in its early stages.

Since its formation in 2004 the Waseda University *samulnori sa-kuru* has undergone the ebb and flow of membership that most university organizations experience on a yearly basis. About 80 percent of the members have been native Japanese, with the remainder Zainichi Koreans. Occasionally, native Koreans who have been exchange students at Waseda University have also joined the group for short periods. In the case of college *p'unngmul* and *samulnori* clubs in South Korea, the survival of a group is contingent upon a strong *sŏn-hubae* system.⁷⁷ Musical transmission and transferral of institutional knowledge occurs from elder to younger colleagues in a cycle that repeats every two to four years. Groups often find themselves in a precarious position when the number of incoming members willing to train and stay in the group is not proportional to the number of senior leaders. In the case of Waseda University's first iteration of the Shinawi *sa-kuru*, the group ceased to continue after Kim Kyōng-ran graduated. In the second iteration, two "founding" members have continued to stay active in the group,

⁷⁷ Literally, "elder/junior" (선배/후배), *sŏn(bae)-hubae* refers to types of relationships that are defined hierarchically by age and usually cultivated between older and younger classmates during college years. In Korea these strong relationships typically last well beyond college. Elder students are accorded respect by their juniors, while younger classmates benefit from mentorship and wisdom from their more senior classmates.

even after graduation from the university. Thus the group has, in effect, maintained a line of senior members since 2004, which has helped to ensure its continuity. Even during a year that Yanaka, the de facto leader, spent studying at Hanyang University in Seoul as an exchange student, the *samulnori* *sakuru* managed to survive. Yanaka joined the *p'ungmul tongari* (group) affiliated with the university and was able to advance his technique and playing of the four percussion instruments. When he returned to Tokyo, he was then able to transmit what he had learned in Korea to the Shinawi group. He mentioned that he also viewed YouTube videos of SamulNori and listened to recordings multiple times to solidify his understanding of some of the standard *samulnori* pieces.



Figure 4.12. Shinawi's YouTube site, with a video of a performance at a 2007 Waseda University Festival.⁷⁸ Source: YouTube.

⁷⁸ "リズム・オブ・コリア" [Rhythm of Korea], YouTube video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrcxytJ9M2M> (accessed October 20, 2008).

Although he graduated from Waseda University in 2007, Yanaka continues to serve in a leadership capacity for the Shinawi *sa-kuru*, which maintains its institutional affiliation with Waseda University. He declines to take responsibility as the group's leader, however, saying that the group dynamic is a collaborative one. He also insists that the Shinawi *sa-kuru* is not a group that strives for perfection in their technique but rather is an informal club centered on "drinking, hanging out together and enjoying playing drums together."⁷⁹ Yanaka is currently employed by the Korean company Samsung, at a branch in Tokyo. Because of the demands of his work life in Japan, it is difficult to find time for rehearsals except at weekends. Other core members such as Yuki Goto and Mayumi Abe, who are employed at a postal office and a marketing company, respectively, also have other commitments throughout the week. Thus the *sa-kuru* rehearses at Waseda University's student center on Saturday afternoons and stores instruments there. The connection with Waseda remains strong, despite the graduation of Shinawi's members. A blog administered by Yanaka mentions this affiliation.

⁷⁹ Yanaka interview, August 14, 2010.

SHINAWEB (シナウィ)

早稲田大学公認サークル「コリア伝統芸能遊戯団シナウィ」のブログへようこそ☆

와세다대학교공인 사물놀이동아리 “시나위” 입니다!

저희는 2004 년부터 활동하기 시작하여 지금까지 한국과 일본에서 수많은 공연을 해왔습니다. 항상 따뜻한 눈으로 지켜봐주시는 여러분들께 감사드립니다. 공연 요청도 기꺼이 응하겠습니다.^.^ 자세한 사항은 관리자에게 문의해주시기 바랍니다. 감사합니다.

Welcome to the blog for the Waseda University registered club—Korea Traditional Performing Arts—Shinawi!

We are Waseda University's registered SamulNori club, Shinawi!

From our start in 2004 until the present, we have performed numerous concerts in both Japan and Korea. We thank you kindly for your warm reception. We will gladly answer performance requests. Please send a detailed message to the webmaster with your request. Thank you.

Figure 4.14. SHINAWEB's blog.⁸⁰

In the fall of 2008 the five members shown in the photograph in Figure 4.11 traveled to Korea to attend and compete in the World SamulNori Festival in Puyŏ. For Yanaka and Goto, this was their second time in the city of Puyŏ. Given that all the members were employed at the time, it was not feasible for the Shinawi group to arrive any earlier than the evening of October 7. The group was unable to participate in the opening event of the festival, having arrived only the night before. They went on to compete, however, in the Gyorugi competition.

As of September 2010 the club's roster includes seven additional members: Go Kaneda, Masako Takahashi, Yuko Kazuno, Rei Sato, Hiroko Fujii, Midori Hanashima, and Akiyo Wakatani. The group continues to rehearse and perform for college festivals and some local events in Tokyo.

⁸⁰ SHINAWEB blog, <http://shinawi.blog64.fc2.com/blog-entry-1.html> (accessed August 14, 2010). Translation by author.

These five profiles provide a glimpse into some of the more extraordinary international encounters with SamulNori over the past two decades. In many ways, these narratives highlight dynamic cross-cultural encounters that have led from an enthusiastic reception of a musical repertory into something that is akin to a musical conversion. As Suzanna Samstag and Hendrikje Lange noted in their interviews, the act of listening was not enough for them; both felt compelled to learn how to play Korean percussion after witnessing their first SamulNori performance. Others such as Wendy Rodríguez Muñoz and Kenichi Yanaka became introduced to the *samulnori* genre through pedagogical workshops that were sponsored by the SamulNori Hanullim organization and partially funded by the Korean government. In comparison to Samstag and Lange, their initial encounters seem rather muted. Yet the experience of learning *samulnori* directly from instructors proved to whet their curiosity about the percussion genre, leading to further investigations in Korean music.

visceral	a shock
heart-pounding	an earthquake
exciting	fabulous
dynamic	powerful
primal	harmonious
hypnotic	natural
spell-binding	graceful
groove	emotional
blown away	stress release
a turf war	fun to play
exciting	group bonding experience

Figure 4.14. Descriptors and phrases used by international fans to describe first encounters with SamulNori the quartet and *samulnori* the genre.

In these first encounters—whether by attendance at a SamulNori performance or through other means—the common descriptors and phrases uttered by interviewees and fans tend towards the dramatic. These vivid descriptions are often devoid of the political associations that tended to permeate the discourse surrounding Korean percussion during the 1980s, and in some Korean American *p’ungmul* groups that had activist leanings.⁸¹ Rather, the semantic emphasis shifts to the more sensory first impressions that are elicited through the sonic or visual experience of observing a SamulNori performance or playing *samul* instruments for the first time. With the exception of the *pinari* narrative prayer song, all pieces in SamulNori’s standard repertory are instrumental or nonverbal—a fact that seems to contribute to its wide range of interpretive meanings held by its listeners. For international audiences first encountering SamulNori (or SamulNori Hanullim) on stage without any prior knowledge of Korean music, musical reception is often directly correlated to the sites of performance, and the energy and excitement evoked by the musicians.

When fandom then transforms into active musical learning and practice, novices of *samulnori* bring with them a desire to recreate that musical synergy for themselves. In an interview on Arirang TV in 2005, Shinparam member Stephen Wunrow expressed the ineffable yet paradoxically *expressive* quality of *samulnori* from the perspective of an amateur performer: “There’s something about the music, something about the actual rhythms and the beats of *samulnori*, I think, educates you about Korean culture in a way that’s not with your head, but more with your heart.”⁸² In other accounts, cultural associations feature less prominently as amateur practitioners have spoken of the unadulterated “fun” or stress-relief that is elicited from being able to bang loudly on drums and gongs.

⁸¹ For examples of the latter, see Kwon, “The Roots and Routes of *P’ungmul* in the United States.”

⁸² See Shinparam’s YouTube page at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5laRBPGUg> (accessed January 10, 2012).

As a whole, these profiles offer alternative ways of conceptualizing musical reception as active and transformative fields of cross-cultural encounters and performance. Eclipsing mere spectatorship, the story of SamulNori's international reception is one that is intertwined with the formation of amateur music-making communities in transnational contexts. The adoption and adaptation of the *samulnori* repertory by international groups have thus led to manifold, dynamic iterations that reflect processes of localization.

CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSNATIONAL SAMULNORI AND THE POLITICS OF PLACE

Beyond providing a chance to simply reflect upon the past thirty years, this year's festival creates a place for international samulnori enthusiasts to assemble their energy and spirit together to think productively about how the music of samulnori can generate new cultural or societal values in the future... Samulnori is no longer solely our own asset.

—Kim Duk Soo, 2008.¹

The year 2008 was a milestone in SamulNori's colorful history, as it marked the passing of thirty years since the founding of the Korean percussion quartet. Many events were planned to celebrate the occasion, including the publication of a commemorative book, the convening of an International SamulNori Symposium in January 2009, and the production of the reunion concerts of the "original" SamulNori quartet held in Korea and Japan in the spring. Underwritten by Credia Korea, the highly publicized reunion tour brought together three of the four principal members—Kim Duk Soo, Lee Kwang Soo, and Choi Jong-sil.² Nam Kimun (formerly of the Seoul-based Namsadang troupe) stepped in as the fourth performer, replacing Kang Min-seok [Kang Minsök], who had declined to participate.³ Touted by the Korean press as the SamulNori "Dream Team," the quartet of seasoned performers

¹ Kim, "Greeting Messages from the Artistic Director and Chairman [of the Festival]," 4. [For reference, the original Korean is included here: "이번 축제는 사물놀이 30 년의 시간을 단순히 돌아보고 기록하는 의미를 넘어서 전 세계 사물놀이 동호인들의 에너지와 정신을 모아 미래의 사물놀이가 음악적으로나 사회, 문화적으로 어떻게 새로운 가치를 창출할 것인지 뜻을 모으는 자리입니다...이제는 사물놀이는 더 이상 우리들만의 자산이 아닙니다."]]

² One of the original quartet members, Kim Yong-bae, died by suicide in 1986.

³ Nam also became the *changgo* player for the in-house *samulnori* quartet of the National Gugak Center (then, National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts or 국립국악원- Kungnip Kugagwön) in 1986.

played to Korean audiences who were curious to witness the rare assemblage of the “founding fathers” of SamulNori.



Figure 5.1. The “founding fathers of SamulNori.” Images used to promote the SamulNori 30th Anniversary Concert tour. ©SamulNori Hanullim

The first performances of the tour were held at the Sejong Center for the Performing Arts [Sejong Munhwa Hoegwan], one of Seoul’s premier venues for the arts. Although there was a great deal of hype surrounding the concerts, reviews of the performances were mixed. While many younger fans were dazzled by the collective star power of the performers, critics and older fans complained that the musicians were no longer in sync with one another, leading to underwhelming performances.⁴ In many respects the reunion concerts that “commemorated the birth of SamulNori” (사물놀이 탄생 30주년 기념공연) were more of a symbolic gesture than a bona fide attempt to recreate the past.

Later, in October of 2008, the SamulNori Hanullim organization hosted the World SamulNori Festival and competition in the county of Puyŏ, home to the SamulNori Hanullim Puyŏ Educational Institute (사물놀이 한울림 부여교육). The three-day event held from October 10 to 12, featured more than seventy participating teams and was prefaced by a week-long workshop for eleven

⁴ Samstag, Suzanna, “What Time Teaches”; Joo Jay-youn, pers. comm.

international *samulnori* teams from nine countries (see Table 5.1). The 2008 event brought together a record number of international participants and attracted national media attention because of the thirtieth anniversary year. While the reunion tour applauded the legacy and accomplishments of the original SamulNori quartet, the World SamulNori Festival celebrated the outward transmission of the *samulnori* genre and the formation of international *samulnori* ensembles over three decades. An account of this event follows, with attention to the cultural politics behind it, highlighting issues that arose when international teams from different countries converged at the same time and place, on the native terrain from which the musical genre of *samulnori* was conceived. I interpolate sections of my fieldnotes from this event, in which I participated during my fieldwork year.

Table 5.1. International *samulnori* teams represented at the World SamulNori Festival, October 10–12, 2008

Belgium	Mujigae (Brussels)
China	Lilac (Harbin)
France	Samul Over the Rainbow (Paris)
Germany	Senari (Berlin)
Japan	Shinawi (Tokyo)
	Han Taep'ung (Osaka)
	Ch'ongsa Ch'orong (Amagasaki)
Mexico	Canto del Cielo (Mexico City)
Russia	Sakhalin Korean Culture Center (Sakhalin Island)
Switzerland	Swissamul (Basel)
United States	Shinparam (Twin Cities, Minnesota)

BACKGROUND TO THE SAMULNORI FESTIVAL

The first SamulNori competition for amateur *samulnori* ensembles was held at the Seoul Olympic Park Stadium on September 27–29, 1989, one year after Seoul hosted the 1988 Summer

Olympics.⁵ Since then the SamulNori Gyorugi Hanmadang [SamulNori Kyörugi Hanmadang] (사물놀이 겨루기 한마당) has largely remained an annual event, typically held in the fall season.⁶ Venues have included the National Center for Korean Performing Arts [National Gugak Center] (1991), Ch'anggyöng Palace (1995), Töksu Palace (1999), Yangpy'öng Athletic field (2000) and Yongmunsan (2001–2004).⁷ The selection of the festival site has often depended on variable factors and been mainly contingent upon availability of funding from regional governments. From 2005 to 2008 the county of Puyö in the southern Ch'ungch'öng province has hosted the SamulNori competition and festival.

At the heart of the SamulNori Gyorugi Hanmadang is a contest in which *samulnori* teams perform in two rounds of competition over the course of three days. Although there is a category of competition for semi-professional teams, the Gyorugi celebrates and encourages participation from amateur *samulnori* groups of all varieties. The majority of these amateur teams come from schools, universities, civic organizations, and cultural clubs throughout Korea. All teams, amateur and semi-professional, compete in various categories for prizes, with the most coveted being the President's Award (대통령상). Based on recommendations and applications from participants, the SamulNori Hanullim organization also invites a handful of international teams to attend. In past years the invited teams from overseas countries have typically received partial or full reimbursement for airfare by the

⁵ Joo Jay-youn, "Samulnori üi yöksajök," 63.

⁶ I render Gyorugi [Kyörugi in McCune-Reischauer] according to the way the SamulNori Hanullim organization has chosen to romanize the term in its publications. The word *kyörugi* (겨루기) comes from the verb *kyöruda* (겨루다), meaning "to compete." The term *hanmadang* (한마당) has many semantic meanings. In this usage, it refers to a gathering or festival. The SamulNori Gyorugi Hanmadang did not take place in 1990, 1996, 1998, or 2009; in 2009 the South Korean government canceled the (renamed) World SamulNori Festival and a number of other performing arts festivals due to concerns about a potential swine flu outbreak in the country.

⁷ For a compiled list of the SamulNori Gyorugi events, see the following website for the 2011 World SamulNori Festival: http://www.samulfestival.co.kr/festival/festival_03_01.asp (accessed December 1, 2011).

Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, and coverage of accommodations and meals by SamulNori Hanullim.⁸

The main thrust of the competition has always been the contest for amateur *samulnori* groups, which culminates in an awards ceremony on the closing day. Although each evening of the Gyorugi has featured performances by either Kim Duk Soo's ensemble or professional musicians (usually appearing in the "Friends of SamulNori" Saturday concert), the evening events are more of a postlude to the day's rounds of competition. The competition proper is divided into a preliminary and a final round, which are spread over the course of the three days.

For the past several years the sequence of events in a SamulNori competition and festival has followed a standardized and efficient schedule. Held over one weekend from Friday to Sunday in order to maximize attendance, the Gyorugi has typically drawn hundreds of participants in a given year. In the application process prior to the festival, groups select to compete in one of three basic categories: *samulnori*, *p'ungmul*, and *ch'angjak* ("newly created" compositions). On the morning of the festival's opening day, representatives from the competing groups draw for order and start in on the first round of competition. Teams are then organized by the main festival staff into a range of sub-categories according to amateur or "professional" status and "age"; the latter being delineated into age brackets of elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and adult divisions. A separate group for "foreign" teams includes non-Korean and ethnic Korean *samulnori* groups that reside outside Korea. As already noted, teams in the "foreigner" category are usually invited directly by the SamulNori Hanullim organization, although some may have been selected to participate through an application process.

⁸ During my tenure as the overseas coordinator for SamulNori Hanullim, I worked closely with the international teams at the 2003 SamulNori Gyorugi Hanmadang, held in Yangp'yŏng. One of my main duties was to facilitate communication between the festival planning committee and the international participants regarding meals, rehearsals, and other event logistics.



Figure 5.2. Poster images from the SamulNori competitions of 1989 and 2008.
©SamulNori Hanullim.

After the first day of preliminary competition, all participants typically take part in a large-scale processional parade known in local terms as *kilnori* (길놀이) or “street play.” The *kilnori* features all performers involved in the event, including members of the SamulNori Hanullim artistic troupe. It is not a rehearsed performance but rather an informal procession of participants perambulating on the festival grounds while drumming, culminating in a rousing and unified “jam” session. The *kilnori* is transposed from the older percussion form of *p’ungmul*, in which *p’ungmul* troupes would process from one area or village to the next while playing.⁹ An allusion to the *kilnori* is also included at the start of a standard SamulNori program, with the *mun kut* (문굿) that processes into the performance of the “Pinari.”¹⁰ (In SamulNori’s interpretation, performers congregate in the lobby just prior to the beginning of a concert and process down the aisles to the stage, where they then perform a narrative prayer song or blessing called *pinari*.)

⁹ Hesselink, *P’ungmul*, 165.

¹⁰ SamulNori’s presentation of the *mun kut* [문굿] (a ritual performed at a door or gate) at the beginning of their standard performance is inspired by older traditions within *p’ungmul* and itinerant performance culture. See chapter 1: Space and the Big Bang.

The first day also features an Opening Ceremony with introductory remarks and acknowledgments by Kim Duk Soo and a select group of local officials. The second day resumes with a full day devoted to the preliminary round of competition. In 2007 there were fifty-six groups (with a total of 702 participants) competing in the preliminary round. A panel of four to five judges (one of whom is the artistic director, Kim Duk Soo), sits through the two rounds of competition.¹¹ At the close of the second day, there is typically a concert featuring guest artists invited by the SamulNori Hanullim organization. In past years guest performers have included *p'ansori* artist An Suksŏn and pop singer Han Yŏng'ae.¹² The third day begins with the final round of competition and concludes in the evening with the awards ceremony, hosted by an MC. The closing ceremony features performances by the winning teams.

Although the majority of festival attendees are indeed the domestic *samulnori* groups appearing in the competition, the festival planning committee goes to great lengths to ensure an enjoyable festival experience for both local and foreign attendees. The festival grounds house various “Experience Culture” (문화체험) activity stations, photography exhibits, merchant stalls, food kiosks, and one main open-air stage for evening performances. As there are several different events running simultaneously, the festival planning committee requires the assistance of volunteers and also technical staff who are often called on as freelancers. In a report issued by SamulNori Hanullim in November 2007, for

¹¹ The judges are usually established *kugak* (traditional Korean music) performers or teachers. In 2008 some of the judges included Im Pyŏnggo, director of the SamulNori Hanullim Puyŏ Educational Institute; Yu Chihwa, a Chŏngŭp nongak practitioner and a “holder” of the Chŏngŭp nongak designated cultural asset; Kim Kwangbok, former member of the Minsok akhoe Sinawi group and a *piri* (small double reed instrument) player; and Suzanna Samstag, former managing director of SamulNori.

¹² *P'ansori*—epic storytelling through song—is a Korean musical genre that is performed by a single singer and accompanied by a drummer (playing the *puk* barrel drum). An Suksŏn is one of the most famous contemporary *p'ansori* artists. She has previously collaborated with SamulNori and the jazz ensemble Red Sun, in addition to serving on the advisory board for the SamulNori Hanullim organization.

instance, the sixteenth SamulNori Gyorugi Hanmadang festival listed fifty-six people as festival staff affiliates.¹³

By 2008 the Gyorugi competition was a well-established music event, already in its seventeenth iteration. During the previous sixteen years of the contest, the event was referred to as the SamulNori Gyorugi Hanmadang, which loosely translates into English as the “SamulNori Competition and Festival.” In October 2008, however, a new title was bestowed on the event—the World SamulNori Festival. In keeping with the self-congratulatory and laudatory tones peppering the discourse surrounding SamulNori’s thirtieth anniversary, the name change reflects a conscious shift in both scope and emphasis placed on the international profile of the 2008 festival. The 2008 *Final Report* on the festival states that it was indeed “only fitting to replace the ‘contest’ moniker with a more apropos ‘festival’ appellation” because it had expanded its circumference of activities to include a “World Networking Program” and had become a more rounded cultural and international event.¹⁴

ARRIVAL IN PUYŎ

My first substantial foray into research during my fieldwork year (2008–009) was a trip to Puyŏ, a county located in the central heartland of Korea. A two-hour drive away from Seoul, Puyŏ was the site of the World SamulNori Festival and also the place where the “SamulNori School” was located. I had worked as a coordinator during the 2003 SamulNori Gyorugi (held in Yangpy’ŏng), and I had also visited Puyŏ numerous times before as a former employee. I was given a ride to Puyŏ by Joo Jay-youn, the managing director at SamulNori Hanullim and my former boss. When we arrived in the city center, I

¹³ SamulNori Hanullim, 2007 *World SamulNori Gyorugi Hanmadang Final Report*, 7.

¹⁴ SamulNori Hanullim, 2008 *World SamulNori Festival Final Report*, 5.

was surprised to discover that the festival grounds were located right in the middle of a cultural heritage complex and adjacent to a well-known tourist attraction known as the Chǒngnim Temple. A nationally designated cultural property, the historic temple is most famous for its five-story granite pagoda, which was constructed during the sixth century of the Paekche Kingdom (18 BCE - 663 CE). Marking the site was a multilingual historical sign, which declared the following for foreign visitors:

Buyeo Jeongnimsa [Puyŏ Chǒngnim temple] site

Historic Site No. 301

*Located at Dongnam-ri [Tongnam-ri], Buyeo-eup [Puyŏ-ŭp], Buyeo-gun [Puyŏ-kun],
Chungcheongnam-do [Ch'ungch'ŏngnam-do]*

This is the site of a Buddhist temple. The temple was built soon after Baekje moved the capital to Sabi (the ancient name of Buyeo [Puyŏ]). The temple used to be a single-storied one typical of Baekje's [Paekche] temples [Paekche kingdom: 18 BCE-663 CE]. Its contemporary name is not known. In the Goryeo [Koryŏ: 918-1392 CE] period the temple was called Jeongnimsa Temple. This fact was clarified due to the discovery of a roof tile. The roof tile produced in 1028 is inscribed with the name, Jeongnimsa. A middle gate, a pagoda, a main hall and a lecture hall were lined up to the south and north. A corridor surround them. The corridor was laid out as a trapezoid. To the south of the middle gate, there used to be two square lotus ponds and the site of the southern gate. A stone statue of the seated Buddha was discovered at the site of the lecture hall. It was made during the Goryeo period, when the temple was rebuilt. This fact means that the lecture hall, made during the Baekje period, was used as a main hall during the Goryeo period.

Figure 5.3. Sign for the Chǒngnim Temple site.¹⁵

A new cultural arts complex was built around the original temple grounds in the mid- to late 2000s. Stone-colored bricks were laid neatly in rows to form wide walkways between stretches of green lawn in the surrounding areas of the site. In the distance I could see the familiar low peaks of mountains. The space itself—with its treasured monuments and heritage museum—seemed to me an odd site for a

¹⁵ The South Korean government has an official Korean language Romanization system that is used in lieu of the McCune-Reischauer. For the sake of consistency, I will include the McCune-Reischauer rendering in brackets.

drumming festival. As I was to discover, however, the selection of the Chǒngnim site was one that resonated well with the bold objectives of the 2008 festival.



Figure 5.4. The Chǒngnim temple and pagoda seen in the background of the festival's outdoor seating area. (photograph by author)



Figure 5.5. Map of festival grounds for the 2008 World SamulNori Festival in Puyŏ. The historic temple grounds (located in the upper left corner) were surrounded on adjacent sides by two outdoor stages (3, 2). The main stage used during the opening event (2) was located in close proximity to the Chǒngnimsaji Museum, while other festival components were located on the lawn. © SamulNori Hanullim.

THE OPENING CEREMONY

The opening concert of the 2008 World SamulNori Festival was the most ambitious opening event in SamulNori's history of hosting the Gyorugi competition and festival. In past years the concert featured the Kim Duk Soo Hanullim troupe, sometimes appearing with other *kugak* performers. As a way to showcase the success of SamulNori's reach throughout the world, in 2008 all the performers from the international teams performed on the same stage. The preparations for the Opening Ceremony began at the Puyŏ SamulNori Educational Institute a few days before the start of the festival. During this period, international teams rehearsed their prepared pieces for the competition and received instruction from instructors. The amateur teams also participated in large group rehearsals for the opening concert, under the musical direction of Kim Duk Soo. With the exception of the French team (who were members of a professional theatrical troupe), most participants had never taken part in a large-scale musical production before. Based on my analyses of fieldnotes and videos, I now provide a narrative description of key moments during the Opening Ceremony of the World SamulNori Festival.

§§§

Dusk has fallen. About 100 meters from the large outdoor stage the performers have gathered near one of the gates for entry to the festival space. They are poised to begin performing at any moment, with colorful flags and instruments in tow. Yet they remain on standby, obligated to wait through the opening comments by the MC, the English interpreter, and various local officials. They stand inconspicuous to the audience, who have already taken their seats and whose eyes are directed toward the illuminated stage. The only people who notice the curious assemblage of internationals are the stragglers, who file past the entrance and the group of

performers. My camera captures them as they quickly brush by. Men clad in black suits point the latecomers to the empty chairs in the back. I am positioned directly in front of the performers, since I am aware of the order of events for the evening. I have a clear view, thanks to the gaggle of journalists and cameramen who take to filming the speakers on stage. At times, I pivot in that direction; the stage appears as beacons of light in the near distance. I want to document as much of this sensory experience as possible—from panning the local audience to focusing in on who is presently delivering remarks at the podium. When I zoom in to the stage, however, my footage becomes wobbly due to the distance and the unsteadiness of the corporeal tripod. Since the speakers are decently amplified, even from where I stand, I decide to try and multitask.

Scanning back to my original vantage point, I see that Kim Duk Soo has now entered the frame. Of modest stature yet brawny build, Kim's figure cuts a larger than life presence to those who know him. He dons a chartreuse hanbok accentuated with a red scarf. He speaks to the young college-aged volunteers who have been elected as the flag bearers for the evening's event. The casualness of their dress is offset by the flags that they accompany. There are ten national flags, representing South Korea and each of the other nine countries from which the festival participants hail. The flag bearers stand in pairs, at the head of the line. "Korea" and "Mexico" assume the lead position. In the middle of a set of opening remarks, Kim Duk Soo directs the entire group to inch closer to their "starting point." The time is getting closer, but there is still at least one other speaker slated for the podium. It is very clear to me that Kim is anxious to get the kilnori on its figurative "road."

§§§



Figure 5.6. Han Taep'ung team (Kōnkuk School) from Osaka, Japan, at the festival's Opening Ceremony.

Directly behind the flag bearers is the team of ethnic Koreans (Zainichi) from the Kōnkuk School in Osaka, Japan. They too bear flags, although theirs are decorated with colorful images of dragons and animals of the Chinese zodiac. Their group is the largest of the overseas teams, and several members display instruments other than the ubiquitous drums and gongs of Korean percussion.¹⁶ Some of the participants carry conches (nagak) and long trumpets known as nabal, instruments that are not part of contemporary samulnori practice. Rather, these are sonic emblems that intimate more ancient lineal affinities of samulnori, such as the variations of ch'wi'ta heard in military band processions and Buddhist instrumental band music. Although the group members are young, they carry themselves with an assured presence, forming a united and impressive front. Some of them start to practice spinning the sangmo and warming up their legs for the show. Because they are such a large group, I can only make out silhouettes of the performers who have lined up behind them. The anticipation just before the official start is palpable in the air.

¹⁶ I use “overseas” (해 외 / 海外) to refer to *samulnori* teams that are non-Korean. This is contrasted with the term *kungnae* (국내 / 國內, domestic), which is understood as Korean.

The signal from Joo Jay-youn (who is the evening's MC) finally comes, and we then hear the striking of the ilch'ae pattern on the barrel and hourglass-shaped drums, interspersed with punctuated grunts. Three affiliate members of SamulNori Hanullim are the ones leading the musical intro. They stand just behind the team from Osaka. The long sustained notes on the conch and trumpet then ceremoniously join in, and are followed in quick suit by a blanket of percussive sounds. The audience has now turned their attention to the sounds, which are audible from their far left. The flag bearers have stationed perpendicular to the performers, and move closer to the stage. Their comportment has changed from slouchy to well postured. Meanwhile, the popular "Arirang" tune is cheerfully rendered on the set of melodic gong chimes by the Korean-Japanese ch'wi'ta band. The tempo is an upbeat one and the performers start to walk in place, bobbing up and down.

"Mun Yöpsyo! Mun Yöpsyo!" booms the stentorian voice of Kim Duk Soo, calling for the festival's symbolic gates to be opened. "Republic of Korea, and the South Ch'ungch'ön Province— Puyö district! World SamulNori Festival—Chöngnimsaji [Chöngnim Temple]—Sumo General—Open the gates!" Participants respond with a prolonged "Ye-eeeeeeee."

"From all corners of the world, the [international] samulnori teams have come, with the county of Puyö and the Republic of Korea, and the world village, many people gather together and go toward the Chöngnimsaji. Now we shall enter—!" "Ye-eeeeeeee." And with that, the procession begins.

While drumming, the participants now make their way to the stage. I stand in one place, watching as this spectacle of nations passes by. The fully outfitted ch'wit'a band, with their rigid kicks of the legs moving in time with the music, plays up the exaggerated embodiment of the martial. They arrange themselves in two straight lines, synchronizing their stylized leg movements with the whole of their group. This contrasts sharply with the relaxed and buoyant spring that the professional SamulNori performers have to their step. The diverse group that follows behind the de facto "leaders" then sprawls out, not adhering to any explicit sense of "order."

Groups sometimes appear in clusters, walking together. A few members of the Russian team, for instance, find themselves walking next to the Mexican group and sandwiched in between members of the Swiss team. The formation of performers is not organized by instrument, either. Barrel drum players appear side by side with small gong players, and then at other times there is an entire row of people playing the hourglass-shaped drum. A visual scan of the loose configurations of performers also brings into relief those who have learned well the embodied practice of hohŭp that emphasizes a holistic connection of the breath to the body when performing. For others, the movements are less natural, and the coordination between playing an instrument and purposefully bending the knees when “walking” appears to sacrifice one action for the other.

With other groups, it is not so much the way in which the body moves but what adorns the body that stands out. The women of the Chinese team from Harbin, for instance, wear patterned cheongsam while playing the drums and gongs. And peeking out from just behind them are the nodding outlines of peacock feathers. These belong to the exuberant headdresses of the Mexican team, who wear traditional Aztec dress. Two of the girls from the Russian team are clothed in what appears to be traditional Russian peasant dress. The other members of their group, however, who are fourth-generation Korean Russians, wear the standard black samulnori outfit with colorful sashes. Likewise, not all groups have opted for the display of ethnic garb. The all-female Swiss team sport a look that is a cross between the modern, modified hanbok and the baggy two-piece attire worn by Korean Buddhist monks. And the American team, which would be hard pressed to come up with an “ethnic costume,” dresses in blue jeans and black T-shirts printed with their group’s name.

Cameramen run in front of my camera now, trying to get a good shot of this parade of diversity. The flag bearers have taken their positions in front of the stage, directly facing the audience, while the group of over 100 performers files in from the left side of the audience proper. A bottleneck forms as the group waits to climb up the one set of stairs onto the stage. As more and more people make their way onto the stage, the movement of people begins to take on a “snail” formation. Growing in density, the crowd squeezes in closer to one another. At

the nucleus are the members of the Osaka-based team, only visible from their pup' o feathered hats. Once everyone is on stage, the small gong players give the signal for the faster paced duple hwimori rhythm. People face the center of the circle, and skip sideways to the beat. The spiral of bodies whirls toward the right, and then finishes to immediate applause from the audience.



Figure 5.7. International *samulnori* teams participate in the festival's opening event. The *kilnori* winds its way from the festival ground's gates to the main stage.

Instead of bowing toward the audience, however, the group bows to the kosa table of offerings, which is located at the back of the stage. Kim Duk Soo then comes onto the stage with a handheld mic. The performers continue to drum, rearranging themselves by forming several lines that face the audience.

Kim Duk Soo introduces himself to the audience and bows respectfully. "We celebrate now the thirtieth anniversary of the birth of SamulNori. And the World SamulNori Gyorugi also has reached its twentieth anniversary. In this magnificent historical and cultural city of Puyŏ, right here at the Chŏngnimsaji site, we have representatives from all around the world—World Samulnorians— who have gathered together in this one place." Kim goes on to announce the program for the evening's special event. "Today's first program has no

historical precedent. . . Right now, the world is difficult. The representatives from each international country, in their own native tongues, will pray for peace. And give well-wishes for the city of Puyö. . . So now I ask kindly if the representatives from the Puyö local offices will please come up to the stage—perform well-wishes for world peace, and ask for the stability of the economy. Lighting of the candles. Thank you. And thus we shall begin.”¹⁷

PERFORMING PINARI

And with that grandiose introduction, the *pinari* for the 2008 World SamulNori Festival officially commenced. But unlike other standard performances of this narrative prayer song that opens a typical SamulNori program, this performance was unusual and, as Kim Duk Soo announced, historic. Never before had an “International Pinari” been attempted, and never before had such a diverse cast of foreign *samulnori* players been assembled to participate in a large-scale performance of it. The “International Pinari” was an ambitious undertaking that served as the conceptual backdrop for an elaborate ninety-minute production that reified and artfully manipulated depictions of the local, the national, and the international.

As the sole text-based piece in the SamulNori repertory, the “Pinari” narrates a cross-section of Korea’s history, geography, culture, and a complex composite of spiritual beliefs. A description of how it appeared in a typical program by the SamulNori quartet is in order here. Since the original group incorporated the *pinari* into their work in the 1980s, it has traditionally been performed as the opening segment of the standard ninety-minute SamulNori program. In an oft cited description of “Pinari” that

¹⁷ A brief translation of terms is provided here: *hanbok*: traditional two-piece garment from Korea, *cheongsam* (ch’i-p’ao): one-piece style of dress from China; *pup’o*: hat made of bird’s feathers typically worn by the *kkwaenggari* player during a *p’an kut* performance in a *samulnori* program, *sangmo*: hat with a long white streamer worn by *samulnori* performers in the *p’an kut*; *ilch’ae*: “one stroke” rhythm, *hwimori*: name of a duple rhythmic pattern; *hohüp*: breath, integrated and embodied breathing technique and philosophy employed by SamulNori in their pedagogy; *ch’wi’ta*: military processional music; *kosa*: a ritual offering ceremony; “Mun Yöpshe!”: “Open the Gates!”

appears in SamulNori's program notes, the genre is described as "a sweeping prayer song that is used to signal the beginning of a stay at a village. The shaman sings an extensive prayer that recounts the tale of creation and many other aspects of Korean beliefs. It calls on various spirits that live in the village and its homes, asking for a blessing upon the people, the players, and the ground they inhabit."¹⁸ As with its adaption of *p'ungmul* into a staged format, the SamulNori quartet also adapted the shamanistic *pinari* narrative song into its performances (Chapter 1). In a standard ninety-minute performance, the "Pinari" is the opening number on the program. In the case of indoor performances in theaters or auditoriums, a *mun kut* (ritual performed at a gate or door) features the performers making their unconventional entrance into the theater from the lobby. With the clarion call asking for the "symbolic" gates of the space to be opened, the performers then proceed through the same doors where the audience enters, and they start the processional that leads directly to the stage. The four percussive instruments of *samulnori* are heard in combination with the sharp nasal timbres of the *t'aep'yŏngso* (shawm), as the musicians step gracefully in time. By the time they reach the stage, the audience's attention has been successfully diverted to the musicians, who assemble in a line formation. The lead singer steps up onto the stage and then begins the *pinari*, with instrumental accompaniment provided by the other musicians.

While there are many variations of the *pinari* text and possibilities for improvisation during the course of a performance, the versions performed by Lee Kwang Soo have become models for subsequent generations of *samulnori* musicians.¹⁹ It was one of Lee's renditions of the "Pinari" from which singer Ch'oe Ch'an-kyun drew in his performance for the "International Pinari" at the festival's opening event.

¹⁸ See Appendix 2 for a description of "Pinari" in SamulNori Hanullim's program notes.

¹⁹ Kim Suyŏng's master's thesis, "Namsadangp'ae pinari pigyo yŏn'gu," features a comparative analysis of four representative *pinari* texts performed by *namsadang* musicians: Ha Ryong-nam (1900–80), Yang, Toil (1908–80), Yi Suyŏng (b. 1940), and Lee Kwang Soo (b. 1952).

The first few lines of Lee’s “Pinari” cover a lot of territory—in the metaphorical and the literal sense. The text opens with the creation of the skies and earth, and then moves very strategically to narrate the foundation of the Chosŏn or Yi Dynasty, which ruled from 1392 until 1910.²⁰ The city of Hanyang (now Seoul) was auspiciously selected as the seat of administration. The Yi Dynasty, born immaculately out of the cosmos, brings peace and prosperity to the people of the Chosŏn state. The designation of Hanyang was made in accordance with the principles of geomancy, heeding the correct alignment of the capital with the Samgak Mountain. It is atop the rising phoenix upon which the grand palace of Chosŏn is erected, and facing the phoenix are laid the foundations for six ministries of governance.

천개(天開)—우주(宇宙) 하늘이요
지개조축(地開 造蓄) 땅생길제
국태민안(國泰 民安) 법륜전(法輪轉)
세화연풍(歲和 年豐) 돌아들고
이씨한양(李氏 漢陽) 등극시(登極時)
삼각산(三角山) 기봉(起峯)하고
봉황(鳳凰)이 생겼구나
봉황(鳳凰)눌러 대궐(大闕)짓고
대궐(大闕)앞에는 육조(六曹)로다

English translation:

The sky and the universe open, and the ground of the earth comes into formation. The prosperity and safety of a nation’s people are cultivated, in accordance with the law.

Peace comes to the country.

It was the time of the establishment of the city of Hanyang as the seat of administration for the Chosŏn Yi Dynasty.

The Samgak mountain stands,

The phoenix rises; and upon the phoenix is the grand palace constructed,

And in front of the phoenix lie six administrative centers.

Figure 5.8. The first stanza (Korean and English) of the “Pinari” text.²¹

²⁰ In Lee’s rendition there is dramatic emphasis and prolongation on the first word, sky, followed by a rapid delivery of text that lies between speech and song.

²¹ For a collection of *pinari* texts (transcribed into Korean only), see Kim Hŏnsŏn, *Kim Hŏnsŏn ūi SamulNori iyagi*, 259-401. Lee Kwang Soo’s “Sori kut ‘Pinari’” CD on Synnara records also includes the texts for his rendition of various Pinari texts.

“Place” is given central importance in this abbreviated genesis narrative of the Chosŏn Dynasty, as it identifies important local sites within the capital city such as the Samgak mountain and the Han river. The text describes how the harmonious alignment of mountains and waterways has led to the obvious selection of Seoul as an administrative center—the rising phoenix of the grand palace with the six governing ministries facing it.

After its narrated mapping of the natural environs of Seoul, the text moves into a second section that intimates an undeniable connection to Korea’s indigenous shamanistic legacies. In an abrupt change of content, the singer quickly lists the numerous kinds of calamities and adversities—*sal* (煞 – 살)—that can strike humans during their lifetime. More than twenty-eight kinds of adversities or “negative forces” are named. Some are domestic misfortunes that befall those with an ailing parent or a deceased loved one. Other misfortunes arise from being out of favor with indigenous spirits such as the Mountain God (山神煞) and the Underwater Dragon King (龍王煞). By naming and identifying the different kinds of *sal*, the singer of the *pinari* attempts to placate such spirits and deities and also to mitigate some of the adversities people encounter in life.

The *pinari* is a highly complex, literary and evocative text. Even the translation of a few lines of this Sino-Korean text into English belies an interpretive endeavor that requires a referential knowledge of pre-modern Korean history and culture. While the *pinari* in and of itself merits a full-length study, the point I underline here is that the introduction of the *pinari* narrative invokes place. As such, the symbolic inscription of place is best understood by those people who have a high degree of proficiency in the Korean language.

It is perhaps for this reason—the highly sophisticated language and the density of text—that the

pinari is one of the pieces least performed by amateur *samulnori* groups outside Korea. Simply put, the language and interpretive skills required demand a linguistic and cultural fluency on the part of the singer. On a performative level, the *pinari* is a challenging piece and can fall flat or lose its efficacy if performed by an inept orator. The singer must be able to memorize and deliver long sections of text, preferably with charisma. Even within Korea the *pinari* is often excluded from the *samulnori* repertory that amateur groups learn and perform. It remains a specialty genre, primarily the trademark of Lee Kwang Soo, Park An-ji [Pak Anji] (of the Samul GwangDae quartet), and just a handful of other professional *samulnori* musicians.



Figure 5.9. Lee Kwang Soo performing the *pinari*. ©Lee Kwang Soo

Although various renditions of the narrative chant have been documented and transcribed by Korean scholars such as Kim Hōnsōn, and in a master's thesis by Kim Suyōng, the *pinari* text has not been incorporated into SamulNori Hanullim's pedagogical workbooks—which feature only

transcriptions and notation for the percussion pieces.²² In many ways, the *pinari* has resisted pedagogical transmission in transnational contexts. Hence I argue that the *pinari* exhibits the most “local” character of the *samulnori* repertory for two primary reasons: the vocal and performative abilities it requires of the musician, and the fact that this narrative act of blessing does not lend itself well to the same kind of pedagogical treatment and transcription that the other percussion pieces have undergone—especially for international audiences.

THE POLITICS OF PLACE IN AN INTERNATIONAL PINARI

Thus the *pinari* is a narrative song that savors its provenance. The notion of an international *pinari* performed by the World SamulNori teams, then, raises the question of how such a performance of the *pinari* will negotiate its sense of locality amidst the diverse background of its international participants. Does the *pinari* lose its local flavor, or is the sense of a Korean locality somehow strengthened by its international ensemble of performers? As I learned through my observations of the rehearsals, interviews with the participants and staff, and filming of the opening event, the mapping and performance of place was a carefully choreographed and constructed undertaking where identifications of the “local” merged into more sweeping nationalistic proclamations. The chief architect was Kim Duk Soo, who envisioned a kind of larger-than-life kick-off to the opening event. Since the 2008 festival celebrated the thirtieth anniversary celebration of the percussion genre’s founding, Kim sought to feature a performance that was indeed unprecedented and unique but that was also informed by a narrative evoking local heritage and history.

Some examples offer insights into how language served to capture and introduce the concept of place in the opening part of the “International Pinari” during the 2008 Opening Ceremony. Ch’oe

²² See Kim Hōnsōn, *Kim Hōnsōn ūi samulnori iyagi*, and Kim Suyōng, “Namsadangp’ae pinari pigyo yōn’gu.”

Ch'an-kyun, the lead small gong player, was the primary singer, who followed Lee Kwang Soo's version of the *pinari* text. Just after hearing about the designation of Hanyang as the capital city for the Chosŏn Dynasty, we were alerted to new textual items inserted directly into the standard rendition of the *pinari* narrative. These were the various well-wishes from representatives from each international *samulnori* group or, by extrapolation—each country. Since it was not expected for the performers to learn the Korean text, representatives spoke in their own native languages, albeit with some awkward inflections and cadences. The first person to recite was the representative from the Shinparam *p'ungmul* troupe, based in the Twin Cities in Minnesota: "We come from Minnesota, land of 10,000 lakes, where the women are strong, the men are good looking and the children are above average. We wish you peace, friendship, and we thank the heaven and the earth and the people of Puyŏ!"²³ The reference to Garrison Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion* worked as a "local" symbol of Minnesota and, perhaps more imaginatively, as a linguistic morsel of Americana.

Other team representatives vocalized similar self-introductions and blessings in Spanish (Canto del Cielo), Russian (Sakhalin Korean Culture Center), French (Samul over the Rainbow), and German (Swissamul). One of the final participants to take to the microphone was the representative from the Osaka (Han Taep'ung) team, a Zainichi Korean affiliated with the Kōnkuk school as a teacher.²⁴ A brief section of his solo is transcribed here: “こんにちは、こんばんわー！私たちは日本から来ました。二世、三世、四世のグループですか。とても韓国の文化が大好きです。特にサムルノリが大好きです！” [Hello, and good evening! We come from Japan. We are a group consisting of

²³ I transcribe from my field video footage of the opening concert at the World SamulNori Festival. For various reasons, I withhold the names of the individuals who sang during the “International Pinari” performance.

²⁴ The term Zainichi (在日) refers to non-Japanese residents who live in Japan. Zainichi Koreans—most of whom first entered Japan during Japan's occupation of Korea (1910-1945)—are considered permanent residents of Japan, yet often do not hold Japanese citizenship. The Kōnkuk school is an ethnic school for Zainichi Koreans in Osaka and caters its pedagogy towards the fervent transmission of Korean language and culture.

2nd, 3rd, and 4th generation Korean Japanese. We really like Korean culture. And we especially love *samulnori*!”] Although the Korean Japanese representative was also fluent in Korean, the use of the Japanese was clearly more desirable in the staging of the “International Pinari.”²⁵ In the opening segment, the demarcation of nation-states was thus strategically articulated through the performance of various national languages.

In my reading of the 2008 World SamulNori Festival, I contend that the selection of the *pinari* text in the festival’s opening event not only served to evoke nostalgia for a cultural high point in Korea’s history; it also sought to articulate South Korea’s place in a twenty-first century global community. This nationalistic posturing became more evident during the second half of the performance, when the “International Pinari” segued into a medley of musical performances—a kind of potpourri of geographical diversity framed in a Korean context.

Festival participants themselves were not always attuned to the politics of place, that were activated in these various musical and cultural registers—whether it was due to language barriers, miscommunication, or simply a matter of concepts being lost in cultural translation. The selection of representatives for the international *pinari* chant, for instance, caused much internal turmoil for a few groups in rehearsal. Some participants were reticent to perform on stage or were unaware of the import of the *pinari*, its contextual implications, and its role in framing the entire musical production. Essentially, on the festival organizers’ end, what was most desired was the convincing embodiment of *difference*, as opposed to a virtuosic imitation of the Korean narrative. For this reason, selected team representatives for the *pinari* were advised by Kim Duk Soo to speak in the language that would best capture a sense of “foreignness” or “otherness.” And, in the case of the Russian and the American teams,

²⁵ The Russian team was also composed mainly of fourth-generation ethnic Koreans residing on Sakhalin Island. During the performance of the “International Pinari,” however, one of the two native Russian members was selected to deliver the solo in Russian.

non-ethnic Koreans were selected over Korean adoptees or ethnic Koreans in order to highlight visually the internationalization of the *samulnori* genre.

In an interview I conducted with Nik Nadeau, a Korean adoptee who was a member of the Minnesota-based Shinparam team, it materialized that the agenda of performing one's own national identity was a point lost on this *samulnori* group, which was mainly composed of Korean adoptees and Caucasian adoptive parents.

We realized our group was very informal. Our group is mostly a way to have fellowship and to you know, appreciate *p'ungmul* for what it is. . . . I just realized it when we rehearsed in front of Kim Duk Soo. What we were supposed to have prepared . . . right, this kind of traditional piece that reflected our country's tradition; I don't know if you caught on, but we were completely unprepared. . . . Apparently, in some e-mail we should have gotten the message that we were to prepare a very short piece that demonstrated the tradition of our own countries . . . we just didn't get this message. So Mexico brought their drums . . . everyone had their own [their kind of ethnic] deal worked out. And we had nothing. We were panicking. . . . We had prepared to do just an improvised stand-in piece. So we performed, and Kim Duk Soo was not happy with this because we were supposed to be reflective of the United States.



Figure 5.10. The author with Shinparam members Lia Bengston (left) and Nik Nadeau (right).

The group was advised by Kim Duk Soo to perform a seated *samulnori* piece, as an alternative.

Although Shinaram would still have been hard-pressed to convincingly perform an “American identity” had they received the advance notice from the festival planning committee, the episode reveals the cultural politics at play in the production of the “International Pinari.” It also speaks to the power differentials that existed due to the structuring and funding of the event. International *samulnori* teams were in beholden to the wishes of the organizers and the artistic director (who were on their home turf).

The Mexican team (Canto del Cielo) staged their traditional heritage by preparing an Aztec dance to perform in Aztec headdresses and costumes. In an interview I conducted with Viridiana Sánchez Zaragoza, I became aware of the contrived nature of this performance. Sánchez Zaragoza explained to me that up until two weeks prior to the festival, the Mexican group members were unsure whether they would even be able to travel to Korea. Once they received confirmation from SamulNori Hanullim as to their airfare and attendance, they scrambled to buy the appropriate outfits and accoutrements. She divulged to me:

We went to a person who practices the dance in the Zócalo [the main square in Mexico City]. It’s a very popular place, you know? Yeah, in the Zócalo, there’s a lot of dance—Aztec dance, dancers. And we asked some of them to teach us the basic steps.²⁶

Thus, only two weeks prior to their departure to Korea the Mexican *samulnori* team learned quite expediently and effectively how to perform Aztec culture for the purposes of the SamulNori opening event. Although they were complete novices in Aztec dance and had rustled up their costumes and choreography in extreme haste, the group members were adept and deftly portrayed a cultural stereotype to the audience. It seemed, in retrospect, that the Mexican *samulnori* team had understood Kim Duk Soo’s underlying motivations in crafting a showcase of national identities that nonetheless

²⁶ Viridiana Sánchez Zaragoza, Skype interview, June 19, 2010.

highlighted Korea and its role as a sending country. As the darlings of the Korean media that year, the Canto del Cielo team put on a strong and confident front at the festival, giving everyone present the clear impression that for them Aztec dance was an inherited tradition, while Korean *samulnori* was a comfortable fit as an adopted one.



Figure 5.11. The Aztec dance performance of Mexico’s Canto del Cielo team instantly focused the media spotlight on this all-girl team, here assembled to be photographed by the press. Photograph by author.

In a final example, I discuss the representation of South Korea’s place in the world as an exporter of culture. In the third and last section of the “International Pinari” showpiece, all performers appeared as unified on the stage, performing “Yŏngnam nongak”—one of the canonic pieces of the *samulnori* repertory, both notated and recorded. As one of the first compositions that students of *samulnori* learn, “Yŏngnam” was a piece that demonstrated an embodied kinship with the *samulnori* genre. As detailed in Chapter 4, most of the *samulnori* teams profiled had learned the “Yŏngnam nongak” (also known as “Yŏngnam samulnori”) piece prior to traveling to Puyŏ. Running at approximately eight minutes in its

most basic form, “Yöngnam nongak” features rhythms from the Kyöngsang (southeastern) provinces of Korea.²⁷ One of the most identifiable elements of the piece is the “Pyöldalgöri” rhythm and chant that is rhythmically recited by performers. The text and SamulNori’s notation for the rhythm follows:

하늘보고 별을따고
 땅을보고 농사짓고
 올해도 대풍이요
 내년에도 풍년일세
 달아달아 밝은달아
 대낮같이 밝은달아
 어둠속에 불빛이
 우리네를 비춰주네!

Look to the sky and gather stars
 Look to the ground and till the earth
 This year was bountiful
 Next year, let it also be so.
 Moon, moon, bright moon
 As bright as daylight
 In the darkness
 Your light gives us illumination!

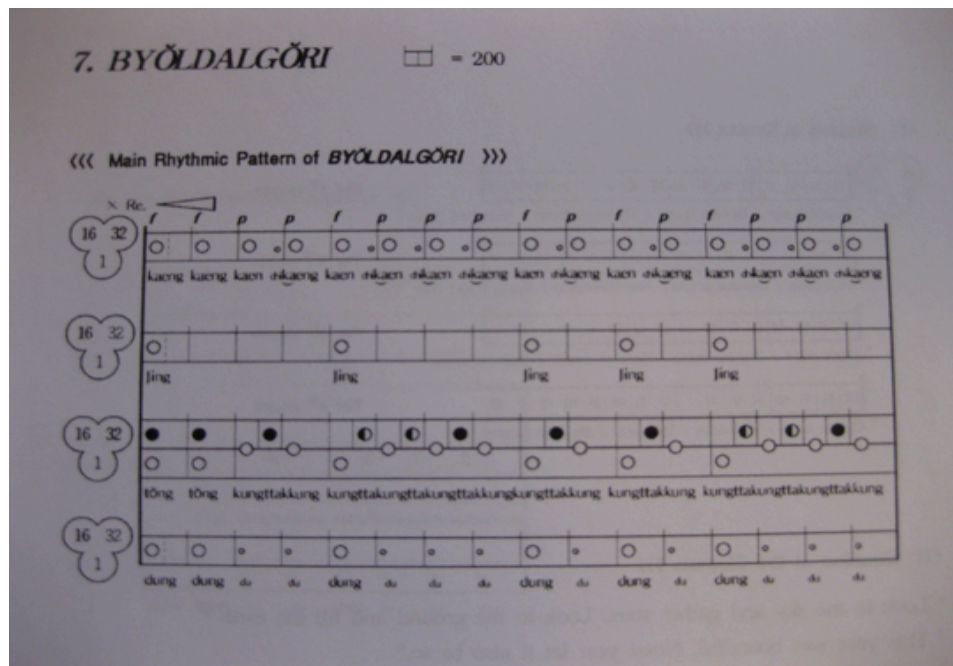


Figure 5.12. Pyöldalgöri text and notation created for English speakers.²⁸

²⁷ “Yöngsan nongak” features the following sequence of rhythms: *kil kunak*, *pan kil kunak*, *tadüraegi*, *yöngsan tadüraegi*, *yöngyölch’ae*, *pyöldalgöri*, and *ssangjinpuri*. [길군악, 반길군악, 다드래기, 영산 다드래기, 연결채, 별달거리, 쌍진पुर리 (맷이)].

²⁸ SamulNori Hanullim, *SamulNori – The Korean Traditional Percussive Music and Dance*, 28. This notation workbook was distributed to all international participants of the 2008 World SamulNori Festival.

Table 5.2. *Pyöldalgöri* drum syllables played on the *changgo*

Symbol key

strike both drum heads
(*kungch'ae* & *yölich'ae*)²⁹

strike left drum head (*kungch'ae*)

strike right drum head (*kungch'ae*)

strike right drum head (*yölich'ae*)

Θ	töng
○	kung
○	kung
/	tta

별달거리: *Pyöldalgöri changdan* (*Pyöldalgöri* rhythmic cycle)

Θ		Θ		○	/	○	
○	/	○	/	○	/	○	
○	/	○		○	/	○	
○	/	○	/	○	/	○	

In recordings and live performances, SamulNori and other professional *samulnori* teams such as the Samul GwangDae quartet have typically performed the *Pyöldalgöri* section at frenetically fast tempi, where the chant, which is shouted in rapid-fire enunciations (interspersed with the rhythm) becomes almost indecipherable to audiences. This is a practice that has been picked up by amateur *samulnori* ensembles, as well—where the point at which *Pyöldalgöri* is performed often features a steamrolled acceleration until the closure of the piece. For international teams without an ethnic Korean presence, the text—which references Korea’s agrarian past—becomes indecipherable for reasons due to garbled Korean language pronunciation and the occasional omission of words. As part of “Yöngnam Nongak,” however, the chant is an essential component of the piece.

²⁹ The *kungch'ae* (궁채) [also: *kunggulch'ae*/궁굴채] and the *yölich'ae* (열채) refer to the mallet and bamboo stick that are used to strike the left and right heads of the *changgo* drum. The *kungch'ae* may be used to play alternately on both heads of the *changgo*, while the *yölich'ae* is used to strike only the right drum head, which is higher pitched than that of the left.

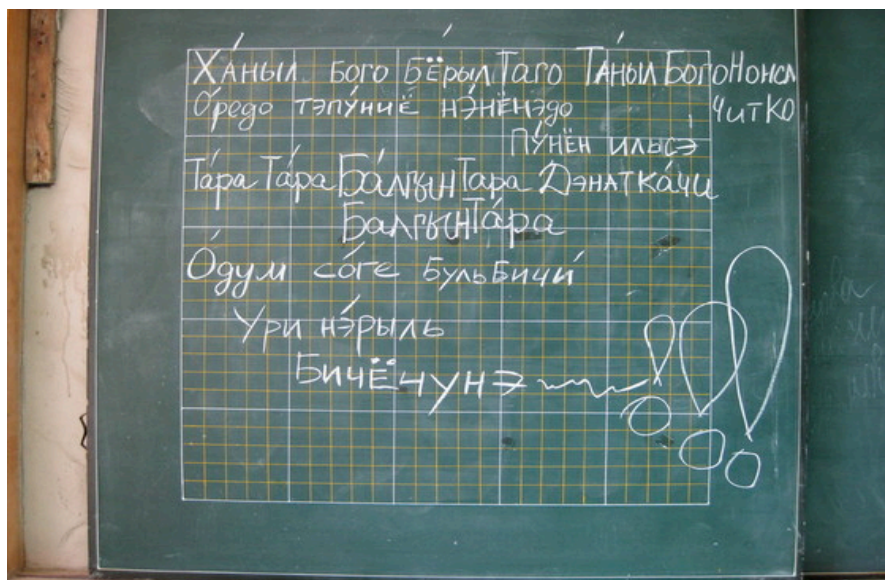


Figure 5.13. A Russian transliteration of the *Pyöldalgöri* chant, inscribed on a chalkboard at the SamulNori Hanullim Puyö Educational Institute during the 2008 World SamulNori Festival. Photograph by author.

During the rehearsals in the week preceding the Festival’s Opening Ceremony, it became apparent that participants from international *samulnori* teams needed a crash-course in the chant. Although some teams had adapted the chant by translating it into their own native language, it was required for the teams to perform the *Pyöldalgöri* chant in Korean at the opening concert of the World SamulNori Festival.³⁰ International participants were drilled on the chant (with some learning it “correctly” for the first time), and its pronunciation, in addition to refining their skills of the instrumental portion of the “Yöngnam Nongak” piece as well. Large group rehearsals were held during the pre-festival workshop, led by Ch’oe Ch’an-kyun and Hong Yunki (members of SamulNori Hanullim), and then overseen by Kim Duk Soo in the dress rehearsals. The teams were expected to train rigorously for the performance, which was to feature “Yöngam Nongak” as the centerpiece for the final segment of the “International Pinari”

³⁰ The Swiss-based Swissamul team was featured on a documentary called “The Beauty of Korean Style – Samulnori” produced by Arirang TV on September 30, 2009. The documentary (which aired in Korea and throughout parts of Asia) featured the group performing the “Yöngnam Nongak” piece with their own spin—translating the chanted portion of the *Pyöldalgöri* into German.

production.



Figure 5.14. International *samulnori* teams at the SamulNori Hanullim Puyŏ Educational Institute rehearse under Ch’oe Ch’an-kyun (playing the small gong) for the opening event of the World SamulNori Festival. Photograph by author.

In considering the conceptual architecture of the “International Pinari” musical production for the World SamulNori Festival, the placement and performance of the “Yŏngnam nongak” piece by the international *samulnori* teams is significant for its strategic representations and constructions of place. Where the first and second segments of the “International Pinari” celebrated difference, and the diverse backgrounds of its international performers, the final segment with the “Yŏngnam Nongak” piece was designed to amplify a *unification* of difference. This was engendered through the collective performance of *samulnori*—South Korea’s most dynamic musical export—by all those who had “imported” *samulnori* as fans and amateur practitioners. The performance of animated drumming in synchrony and the

recitation of the *Pyöldalgöri* chant in the Korean language by all of the international participants (who wore their sartorial markers of ethnicity) was an impressive display of nationalistic spirit and pride in Korea's cultural prowess.

Doreen Massey notes that “what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus.” Massey argues further that “if places can be conceptualized in terms of the social interactions which they tie together, then it is also the case that these interactions themselves are not motionless things, frozen in time.”³¹ In the production of the “International Pinari” in the 2008 World SamulNori Festival, the international reception of the *samulnori* genre becomes a pivotal modality through which South Korea is defined as a key player in the global market. In the vision of the festival organizers, contemporary “Korea” is thus produced through the transnational social relations and communities that are fostered through the global encounters with *samulnori* in the twenty-first century.

As this review of sample components and aspects of performance reveals, the selection of the *pinari* as the primary conceptual frame for the 2008 festival's Opening Ceremony was a choice richly vested in layers of symbolism. Arranging for the most vernacular of all of the *samulnori* pieces to be performed by an international cast of players was an act that not only conveyed the international reach of the local but also served to elevate the status of the local by strategically inflecting the “global.” Second, because other pieces in the *samulnori* repertory are already well rehearsed by teams in Korea and abroad, the performance of the “International Pinari” had a novelty factor that aligned very well with the celebration of SamulNori's thirtieth anniversary. And lastly, the “homecoming” of international

³¹ Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” 154–55.

participants was a special moment for Koreans to witness the fruits of the widespread transmission of the *samulnori* genre—on their own native land. Seeing that the *pinari* is a prayer song that is precisely a meditation on place, it was the ideal narrative in which to stage the global encounters with SamulNori, and thus with Korea, the nation.

EPILOGUE

In January 2011 I was notified by Joo Jay-youn that SamulNori Hanullim would be performing at Harvard as part of a US east coast tour. The tour was the first trial run with the group's new American agent, after a several year hiatus without official representation in the United States. I was delighted that my colleagues and mentors would be able to witness the "SamulNori experience" that I had been talking about for so many years. And since I was in the middle of writing my dissertation, it was an unusual opportunity to revisit the personalities who were central to my research during my fieldwork year.

I was contacted by the presenter of the event to see whether I might be able to arrange a *samulnori* workshop with the performers at Harvard. After a series of meetings with various administrators over a few months, I was able to secure a location for an event through the Learning from Performers series at the Office for the Arts. For Kim Duk Soo, the invitation to lead a lecture and demonstration at Harvard represented a validation and recognition of his life's work. Since my matriculation at the university, he had often expressed to me his desire to lecture or have a residency at Harvard. Finally, he would be given his chance.

By the time November came around, the tour logistics were finalized and had fallen into place. I met with the group (whose members now consisted of graduates of the Korea National University of the Arts) and Kim Duk Soo upon their arrival in Boston on November 6. Their tour started the following day and would stop over at a few universities before circling back to Boston for a performance at Sanders Theater on November 11.

Two days before their arrival, the "Occupy Harvard" movement started and effectively placed the campus in lockdown mode. Only those with Harvard IDs would be permitted to enter the guarded gates of Harvard Yard. Tents were pitched in front of University Hall, and stood as a symbol of solidarity

for the various protest movements that had sprung up around the world after “Occupy Wall Street.” As one online media source put it—Occupy Harvard had unwittingly become the most exclusive protest in the world.¹

By Thursday evening, I was alerted to the news that the performance at Sanders Theater would be unaffected by the protest, but that the lecture/demonstration was cancelled (as were all weekend events that were scheduled to take place in Harvard Yard). I was faced with the duty of notifying the musicians of the cancellation and the restrictions placed on visitors entering Harvard Yard.

As someone who has researched protest culture (especially with respect to the role of music in protest as a mobilizing force), the Occupy Harvard movement resonated with irony on many levels. To Kim Duk Soo and two of the older musicians who had lived through the tumult of South Korea’s democratization movement, the protest did not register visually (or sonically) as a demonstration of resistance. One member of the group who observed the tents through the locked gates asked innocently whether students were camping on the university’s grounds.

During the rehearsal and sound check on Friday afternoon, it was soon apparent that Sanders Theater’s superior acoustics were not optimal for the sounds of Korean percussion. According to Kim Duk Soo, the wooden interior of the theater “swallowed the *changgo*,” creating a sharp spike followed by an almost immediate muffling of the sound.² When the instruments were played in concert, the timbral colors were washed out and flat. After much testing and consultation with the sound engineers, the musicians were able to ameliorate the conditions of the space by adjusting microphone levels. Despite all

¹ Estes, “Harvard Keeps Occupy Harvard Harvard-Only”: <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/national/2011/11/harvard-keeps-occupy-harvard-harvard-students-only/44812/> (accessed November 11, 2011).

² Kim Duk Soo, pers. comm.

of the challenges with acoustics and the disappointing turn of events, the musicians managed to handle the situation with grace and aplomb.

For two hours that Friday evening, SamulNori Hanullim occupied Sanders Theater, and delivered their best sonic version of a “Dynamic Korea” to an audience of several hundred Bostonians. They were in prime form, and were enlivened by the attendees, who cheered generously. The group performed the standard ninety minute program with a slight modification. They began with the *mun kut* and *pinari*, and the enactment of the *kosa* ritual at the back of the stage.³ During the second half of the program, when the musicians typically perform the *p’an kut*, a gesture was made towards the group’s *namsadang* lineage with the *põna* plate spinning act (now a regular featured element at Kim Duk Soo’s “Pan” show at the Gwanghwamun Arts Hall in Seoul). This elicited delight from the audience. At the conclusion of the performance, interested audience members were invited to come directly onto the stage to dance with the performers. Approximately one hundred people joined on stage. As I was to hear from many friends and audience members later that evening at the reception, the SamulNori performance lived up to its hard-earned reputation.

I spend some time chronicling this performance because it culls together several key issues as well as characters that are present in my dissertation. The Occupy Harvard protest, while earnest in intent, had the unfortunate repercussion of the cancellation of several scheduled events in Harvard Yard. SamulNori Hanullim had no choice but to abide by University’s official decision and stay outside the

³ At other performances on SamulNori Hanullim’s east coast tour, audiences were not aware of their expected participation in the *kosa*, and thus remained seated during the *pinari*. Knowing this in advance, I consulted with Kim Duk Soo to invite selected guests to approach the stage and make an offering at the *kosa* table. Approximately fifty people followed suit and appeared on stage.

Yard's vicinity. In a slightly more dramatic way, SamulNori Hanullim experienced what many international *samulnori* teams had encountered when first arriving in Puyŏ for the 2008 World SamulNori Festival—an initial sense of confusion followed by a realization that the host institution held ultimate sway over the proceedings. The politics of place similarly reared its head here, albeit in a completely different set of concerns and circumstances.

The November 2011 performance at Sanders Theater also brought in attendance several members of the newly configured MIT-based Oori *p'unngmul* group. For nearly all of the new members, this was their first time seeing SamulNori Hanullim and Kim Duk Soo perform live. Their excitement was palpable prior to and after the performance. Under new leadership, the Oori group has performed the *samulnori* repertory exclusively, and ventured into collaborations with jazz musicians. Despite some members' initial critiques against *samulnori*, the group no longer seemed to harbor the same resistance towards the musical genre or the group—even inviting members of SamulNori Hanullim to lead an informal workshop at M.I.T. that weekend (swiftly taking advantage of the unexpected cancellation of the event).

In terms of spatial issues, the site of Harvard's Sanders Theater also recalls some of the incongruous settings for some of SamulNori's most important performances and events—from the nondescript space of the Konggan theater to the selection of the Puyŏ Chŏngnim temple grounds as the venue for the World SamulNori Festival. Even despite acoustic issues and seemingly ill-fitting venues, SamulNori Hanullim managed to successfully *Occupy* Sanders Theater through its dynamic performance on November 11, 2011.

THINGS CHANGE⁴

As evidenced by Oori's enthusiastic attendance at the SamulNori Hanullim performance, the changing nature of a group's membership gives the ethnographer pause to try and rein in the analysis to materials collected during the fieldwork year. It goes without saying, however, that musical groups change as easily people can change their political views (or retract their statements). Membership rotates or drops off, and can later experience a growth or rebirth of sorts. While writing my dissertation, I realized that my own observations and analysis bled beyond the temporal and geographical boundaries of the fieldwork year. Interviews that I conducted in Korea in 2008 were deeply informed by my time spent working for SamulNori Hanullim in Korea. Similarly, my experiences as both a member of the Oori *p'unngmul* group and a former staff member played into my analysis of texts in circulation. And since leaving Korea in 2009, I have managed to stay connected with many of the participants at the World SamulNori Festival. What I have learned from social networking sites is that the configuration of these amateur musical groups is inherently malleable and prone to drastic change. Yet, the departure of certain members in a group does not necessarily signal a group's demise. It may in fact reveal an individual's commitment to furthering one's musical literacy, as in the case of Swissamul's Hendrikje Lange (who is now enrolled as a degree student at the Korea National University of the Arts).

While this lack of tidiness may dissuade some scholars from undertaking ethnographic research with communities, I find the prospect of long-term ethnography a rewarding if not humbling endeavor. The ethnographer's findings must always be subject to further scrutiny by his/her interlocutors, and framed alongside history. Claims and assumptions made from short-term ethnographic research may indeed be invalidated over time, but may also lead to new questions and ways of understanding broader processes and social patterns. This is equally relevant in the realm of historical research, as well. In

⁴ A song featured on Red Sun/SamulNori's "Nanjang: A New Horizon" CD.

chapter two, I discuss the benefits of melding historical and ethnographic modes of analysis. My interpretations gleaned from observation of historical video footage was calibrated through my interview with a participant at the scene of a protest. Through this system of checks-and-balances, a researcher can gain an enriched portrait of an event, whether it is in the recent past, or spills into the present.

At the heart of this ethnographic reception study lies the continuing thread of community. Some of SamulNori's critics would argue that the concept of "community" or *kongdongch'e* is in fact what distinguishes *samulnori* from *p'ungmul*. Yet, there are definite communities of "descent," "dissent," and "affinity"—to borrow Kay Kaufman Shelemay's typology—at play in the story of the *samulnori*'s international reception.⁵ International *samulnori* teams represent the processes of community formation through shared musical affinities, while the elements of dissent are clearly activated in the case of the student activists performing *p'ungmul* (and by association, *samulnori*) in protest. Musical communities of "descent" can be reflected in the Korean American example and in the first two chapters. But perhaps what remains most interesting is the interplay of the cultural politics over time, as exhibited by these various musical communities—where sounds, ideas, texts, and meanings are much more connected than we may think them to be.

⁵ See Shelemay, "Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music."

APPENDIX ONE: PERFORMANCES OF KUGAK AT THE SPACE THEATER, 1977-1989¹

Apr. 22, 1977	전통예술의 밤	Evening of traditional arts
Apr. 24, 1977	전통예술의 밤	Evening of traditional arts
Apr. 26, 1977	전통예술의 밤	Evening of traditional arts
Apr. 28, 1977	전통예술의 밤	Evening of traditional arts
Feb. 22-23, 1978	전통음악의 밤	Evening of traditional music
Mar. 29-30, 1978	전통음악의 밤	Evening of traditional music
Apr. 18-22, 1978	전통무용의 밤	Evening of traditional dance
Apr. 26-27, 1978	전통음악의 밤	Evening of traditional music
May 24-25, 1978	전통음악의 밤	Evening of traditional music
Jun. 28, 1978	전통음악의 밤	Evening of traditional music
Jul. 26, 1978	전통음악의 밤	Evening of traditional music
Sep. 27, 1978	전통음악의 밤	Evening of traditional music
Oct. 4-11, 1978	공옥진 1 인 창무극	Kong Okchin solo <i>ch'angmugük</i>
Oct. 12-18, 1978	꼭두각시놀음	Puppet play (one of the 6 <i>namsadang</i> acts)
Nov. 11-17, 1978	전통무용의 밤	Evening of traditional dance
Nov. 29, 1978	전통음악의 밤	Evening of traditional music
Dec. 2-17, 1978	공옥진 1 인 창무극	Kong Okchin solo <i>ch'angmugük</i>
Mar. 1, 1979	민속악회 시나위 정기연주회	Minsok akhoe Sinawi Regular concert
Mar. 3-15, 1979	공옥진 1 인 창무극	Kong Okchin solo <i>ch'angmugük</i>
Apr. 18-21, 1979	개관 2 주년 민속공연	Traditional arts festival (for 2 nd year anniversary)
Jul. 29, 1979	발탈 공연	Masked puppet theater (with use of the feet)
Sep. 8-16, 1979	발탈 공연	Masked puppet theater (with use of the feet)
Sep. 18, 1979	김무규 단소 독주회	Solo <i>tanso</i> performance by Kim Mukyu
Oct. 22-23, 1979	민속악회 시나위 2 회 정기연주회	Minsok akhoe Sinawi 2 nd regular concert
Nov. 14, 1979	민속굿제 (동해안오귀굿)	Traditional <i>kut</i> festival (East coast <i>ogwi kut</i>)

¹ This chart is adapted and translated from information presented in an M.A. thesis by Kang Jae Hoon [Kang Chaehun] “Kihoeok kongyönjang üi sarye rosö.” and confirmed against a file entitled, “1977-1990 sogükchang Konggan Sarang Kongyön yönbo” [“Annual (report) of concerts at the Konggan Sarang small theater, 1977-1990”]. The latter file can be accessed at the following URL:

http://www.culture.go.kr/art/knowledge/filedown.jsp?file_name=공간사랑연보.xls (accessed March 3, 2012).

Nov. 15, 1979	민속굿제 (진도씻김굿)	Traditional <i>kut</i> festival (Chindo <i>ssitkim kut</i>)
Nov. 16, 1979	민속굿제 (서울굿)	Traditional <i>kut</i> festival (Seoul <i>kut</i>)
Nov. 17, 1979	민속굿제 (경기도당굿)	Traditional <i>kut</i> festival (Kyōnggi <i>todang kut</i>)
Jan. 10-11, 1980	황해도 철물이 굿	Hwanghae Province <i>chōlmuri kut</i>
Jan. 25, 1980	제 1 회 민요의 밤 서도민요	1 st evening of Korean folk songs (Sōdo <i>minyo</i>)
Feb. 1, 1980	가야금 연주회 (이화금)	<i>Kayagŭm</i> recital (Yi Hwagŭm)
Feb. 2-17, 1980	공옥진 1 인 창무극	Kong Okchin solo <i>ch'angmugŭk</i>
Feb. 19-22, 1980	양주별산대 (이경희)	Yangju Pyōlsandae puppet play (Yi Kyōnghŭi)
Feb. 23, 1980	한국영가의 밤 (박상화)	Evening of Korean Spiritual Songs (Pak Sanghwa)
Feb. 25, 1980	1 회 서도 민요의 밤	1 st evening of Korean folk songs (Sōdo <i>minyo</i>)
Apr. 14-16, 1980	양주별산대 (이경희)	Yangju Pyōlsandae puppet play (Yi Kyōnghŭi)
Sep. 4-5, 1980	지성자 가야금 연주회	Chi Sōngja <i>kayagŭm</i> recital
Sep. 29, 1980	걸립패 풍물굿	Kōllipp'ae <i>p'ungmul kut</i>
Nov. 1, 1980	양승희 가야금 독주회	Yang Sūnghŭi <i>kayagŭm</i> solo recital
Nov. 10-16, 1980	홍동자의 나들리 (심우성)	Hong Tongja play with Sim Woo-sung [Sim Usōng]
Feb. 23, 1981	1 회 전통예술의 밤	The 1 st traditional arts festival night
Mar. 16, 1981	전통예술제 (사물놀이)	Traditional arts festival (<i>samulnori</i>)
Mar. 17, 1981	전통예술제 (향채풍류)	Traditional arts festival (Hyangje P'ungnyu)
Mar. 18, 1981	전통예술제 (이매방)	Traditional arts festival (Yi Maebang)
Mar. 19, 1981	전통예술제 (김숙자)	Traditional arts festival (Kim Sukcha)
Mar. 20, 1981	전통예술제 (걸립패풍물굿)	Traditional arts festival (Kōllipp'ae <i>p'ungmul kut</i>)
Mar. 30, 1981	2 회 전통예술의 밤	The 2 nd traditional arts festival night
Apr. 27, 1981	3 회 전통예술의 밤	The 3 rd traditional arts festival night
May 25, 1981	4 회 전통예술의 밤	The 4 th traditional arts festival night
Jun. 28, 1981	5 회 전통예술의 밤	The 5 th traditional arts festival night
Aug. 31, 1981	6 회 전통예술의 밤	The 6 th traditional arts festival night
Sep. 14-19, 1981	공옥진 1 인 창무극 (심청전)	Kong Okchin solo <i>ch'angmugŭk</i> (Simch'ōng-jōn)
Sep. 22, 1981	전통가곡의 밤	Evening of traditional songs
Sep. 23, 1981	영산회상 (울여악회, 국립국악원)	Yōngsan hoesang (Yuryō Society, National Gugak Center)
Sep. 28, 1981	7 회 전통예술의 밤	The 7 th traditional arts festival night
Oct. 2-12, 1981	공옥진 1 인 창무극 (심청전) 재공연	Kong Okchin solo <i>ch'angmugŭk</i> (Simch'ōng-jōn) repeat performance
Oct. 26, 1981	8 회 전통예술의 밤	The 8 th traditional arts festival night
Nov. 30, 1981	9 회 전통예술의 밤	The 9 th traditional arts festival night

Dec. 22, 1981	성애순 가야금 연주회 김일구 판소리, 아쟁 발표회	Söng Aesun <i>kayagŭm</i> recital Kim Ilku <i>p'ansori, ajaeng sanjo</i> Presentation
Jan. 6, 1982		
Mar. 29, 1982	10 회 전통예술의 밤	The 10 th traditional arts festival night
Apr. 26, 1982	11 회 전통예술의 밤	The 11 th traditional arts festival night
May 31, 1982	12 회 전통예술의 밤	The 12 th traditional arts festival night
Jun. 2-3, 1982	82 여민속예술큰잔치 이재호 범패바라춤	82 Summer traditional arts festival (Yi Chaeho, <i>pömp'ae parach'um</i>)
Jun. 4-5, 1982	82 여민속예술큰잔치 이동안 전통무용, 발탈	82 Summer traditional arts festival (Yi Tong'an, traditional dance & <i>palt'al</i>)
Jun. 6-7, 1982	82 여름 민속예술큰잔치 김숙자 민속, 무속무용	82 Summer traditional arts festival (Kim Sukcha, traditional & shaman dance)
Jun. 8-9, 1982	82 여름 민속예술큰잔치 공대일, 강도근 홍보가	82 Summer traditional arts festival (Kong Taeil, Kang Togŭn, Hungbo-ga)
Jun. 10-11, 1982	82 여름 민속예술큰잔치 안채봉 심청가	82 Summer traditional arts festival (An Ch'aebong, Simch'öng-ga)
Jun. 12-13, 1982	82 여름 민속예술큰잔치 성우향 춘향가	82 Summer traditional arts festival (Söng Uhyang, Ch'unhyang-ga)
Jun. 14-15, 1982	82 여름 민속예술큰잔치 조한춘 경기무속음악	82 Summer traditional arts festival (Cho Hanch'un, Kyönggi shamanistic music)
Jun. 16-17, 1982	82 여름 민속예술큰잔치 우옥주 황해도 만구 대탁굿	82 Summer traditional arts festival (U Okchu, Hwanghae-do <i>man'gu</i> <i>taet'ak kut</i>)
Jun. 28, 1982	13 회 전통예술의 밤	The 13 th traditional arts festival night
Jul. 28, 1982	한미교육위원회 (인형극 사물놀이)	Korean-American Educational Commission (Puppet theater <i>samulnori</i>)
Aug. 30, 1982	14 회 전통예술의 밤	The traditional arts festival night
Sep. 27, 1982	15 회 전통예술의 밤	The 15 th traditional arts festival night
Sep. 30, 1982	박상화 영가의 밤 공간 22 주년 창단	Pak Sanghwa evening of spiritual songs
Nov. 1-5, 1982	기념공연 정인방 전통무용	Konggan 22 nd anniversary concert (Chöng Inbang, traditional dance)
Nov. 6, 1982	김동진 대금산조	Kim Tongjin <i>taegŭm sanjo</i>
Nov. 7-10, 1982	진도 다시래기	Chindo <i>tasiraegi</i>
Dec. 4-5, 1982	사물놀이 귀국공연	SamulNori [return from abroad] concert
Dec. 16-20, 1982	김소희 민요발표회	Kim Sohŭi, Recital of Korean folk songs
Mar. 28, 1983	16 회 전통예술의 밤 (호적과 사물)	The 16 th traditional arts festival night (Hojök & Samul)
Apr. 25, 1983	17 회 전통예술의 밤 (김복섭독경)	The 17 th traditional arts festival night (Kim Poksöp, chanting)
May 30, 1983	18 회 전통예술의 밤	The 18 th traditional arts festival night

Jun. 27, 1983	19 회 전통예술의 밤 (무속장단및 3 도 설창고 가락)	The 19 th traditional arts festival night (Shaman Rhythm & Söl changgo rhythms from three provinces)
Aug. 12, 1983	사물놀이 창작무대 (북소리)	Samulnori Creative Stage (<i>puk sori</i>)
Aug. 29, 1983	20 회 전통예술의 밤 (이애주 전통무용)	The 20 th traditional arts festival night (Yi Aeju, traditional dance)
Sep. 4, 1983	김덕명 전통무용	Kim Tongmyöng traditional dance
Oct. 6-20, 1983	공옥진 1 인 창무극 (수궁가)	Kong Okchin solo <i>ch'angmugük</i> (Sugung-ga)
Oct. 31, 1983	21 회 전통예술의 밤 (송화영 전통무용)	The 21 st traditional arts festival night (Song Hwayöng, traditional dance)
Nov. 3, 1983	김애정 판소리	Kim Aechöng <i>p'ansori</i>
Nov. 22-23, 1983	신혜정, 김명주 춤판	Sin Hyejöng & Kim Myöngju (<i>ch'ump'an</i>)
Nov. 28, 1983	22 회 전통예술의 밤 (송화영 전통무용)	The 22 nd traditional arts festival night (Song Hwayöng, traditional dance)
Feb. 27-28, 1984	23 회 전통예술의 밤 (성금연 가야금연주회)	The 23 rd traditional arts festival night (Song Kūmyön, <i>kayagūm</i> recital)
Mar. 26, 1984	24 회 전통예술의 밤 (동해안오귀kut)	The 24 th traditional arts festival night (East coast Ogwi <i>kut</i>)
Apr. 12-13, 1984	통영오귀 새남굿	Tongyöng Ogwi Saenam <i>kut</i>
May 27, 1984	야외극장 공간 마당 "남사당 놀이 6 마당"	Performance at the outdoor theater: "6 acts of <i>namsadang</i> "
May 28, 1984	제 25 회 전통예술의 밤 (사물놀이)	The 25 th traditional arts festival night (SamulNori)
Jun. 25, 1984	26 회 전통예술의 밤 (김수악 구음 송화영 춤)	The 26 th traditional arts festival night (Kim Suak <i>kuŭm</i> , Song Hwayöng dance)
Aug. 27, 1984	27 회 전통예술의 밤 (이선옥)	The 27 th traditional arts festival night (Yi Sönok)
Sep. 24, 1984	28 회 전통예술의 밤 (사물놀이)	The 28 th traditional arts festival night (SamulNori)
Nov. 16, 1984	송화영 기방 춤판	Song Hwayöng <i>kibang</i> [<i>kisaeng</i>] <i>ch'ump'an</i>
Nov. 26, 1984	29 회 전통예술의 밤 (사물놀이)	The 29 th traditional arts festival night (SamulNori)
Dec. 23, 1984	이동안 발탈밧 전통무용	Yi Tongan palt'al [masked puppet theater with the use of feet] & traditional dance
Jan. 10-11, 1985	사물놀이 출국 기념공연	SamulNori [departure from Korea] Memorial concert

Feb. 25, 1985	30 회 전통예술의 밤 (사물놀이)	The 30 th traditional arts festival night (SamulNori)
Mar. 25, 1985	31 회 전통예술의 밤 (송화영, 이미순 출판)	The 31 st traditional arts festival night (Song Hwayöng & Yi Misun <i>ch'ump'an</i>)
May 27, 1985	33 회 전통예술의 밤 (박홍출 적벽가)	The 33 rd traditional arts festival night (Pak Hongch'ul, Chökbyök-ka)
Jun. 20-21, 1985	송영석 창작 율창 발표회	Song Yöngsöck Creative Yulch'ang Presentation
Jun. 24, 1985	34 회 전통예술의 밤 (김수악출판)	The 34 th traditional arts festival night (Kim Suak, <i>ch'ump'an</i>)
Jul. 3-4, 1985	경기민요의 밤 (묵계월 외)	Evening of <i>Kyönggi minyo</i> (folk songs) (Muk kyewöl +)
Oct. 16-20, 1985	사물놀이 공연 (각 지방 농악가락)	SamulNori concert (<i>Nongak</i> rhythms from each region)
Oct. 28, 1985	35 회 전통예술의 밤 (김계화의 춤)	The 35 th traditional arts festival night (Kim Kyehwa dance)
Nov. 21-22, 1985	박윤초 가야금 가락과 춤사위	Pak Yuncho <i>kayagüm</i> rhythm [melody] & dance styles
Feb. 24, 1986	36 회 임이조 출판	The 36 th Im Ijo <i>ch'ump'an</i>
May 26, 1986	고 김용배 추모굿 (진도씻김굿)	The memorial <i>kut</i> for the late Kim Yong -bae (Chindo Ssitkim <i>kut</i>)
Dec. 28, 1987	김덕수 사물놀이	Kim Duk Soo SamulNori
Mar. 30-31, 1989	공간무용의 밤 (탈춤)	Evening of Traditional Dance (<i>t'alch'um</i>)
Nov. 2-5, 1989	김영태의 쏫터울림	Kim Yöngt'ae's Sottö ullim

APPENDIX TWO: “SAMULNORI: ‘TRADITION MEETS THE PRESENT’”

English program notes for SamulNori’s standard ninety-minute program.²

BINARI (Prayer Song)

A sweeping prayer song that used to signal the beginning of a stay at a village. *Binari* can now be heard at events such as the opening of a new business or building, or at a performance such as tonight’s. The shaman sings the extensive prayer, which touches on many aspects important to Korean beliefs. It recounts the tale of creation and it calls upon the various spirits that reside in the village and homes, eventually asking for a blessing upon the people, the players and the ground they inhabit.

Placed on the altar is an abundance of food offerings to the gods and to ancestors, and a pig’s head. Audience members are invited to approach the altar, bringing with them their prayers. They may also light an incense stick, pour rice wine and bow. It is customary to place an offering of money on the altar. The head of the pig signifies wealth, health and abundance; and, if an offering of money is placed in the mouth of the pig, it is believed that the prayers brought to the altar will be answered generously.

SAMDO SUL CHANGGO KARAK (Changgo Rhythms from Three Provinces)

All four men are seated with *changgo* (hourglass drum) and play an arrangement consisting of the most representative *changgo karak* (rhythm patterns) of three Korean provinces. Originally, one player would fasten the *changgo* to his body and perform a showy solo piece, flaunting his unique style of dance and technique. SamulNori created this new arrangement to be played while seated, shifting the focus from showmanship to musicality. This piece consists of five movements, showcasing five different *karak*, beginning with the technically demanding “Tasurim,” and finishing off with the climatic “Hwimori.”

SAMDO NONGAK KARAK (Nongak Rhythms from Three Provinces)

Samdo Nongak Karak also is an arrangement of different rhythms from the three provinces. Some of the *karak* that appeared in *Samdo Sul Changgo Karak* also appear here, now interpreted

² The following is a sample of the English program notes that were circulated by SamulNori’s American representation, Herbert Barrett Management, Inc. during the 1990s (Herbert Barrett Management, “SamulNori: ‘Tradition meets the present’”). The text is authored by Suzanna Samstag. (In order to preserve the coherence of the original text, I do not include the McCune-Reischauer romanization of Korean terms in this text.)

by the four different instruments. During festivals, performers would traditionally have played these instruments while dancing, but SamulNori has broadened the scope of the many karaks that appear by playing seated and developing the musical possibilities of this arrangement.

The music's intimacy with the land and agrarian culture is evident in the verses the performers exclaim before the climatic portion of this piece:

Look to the sky and gather stars.
Look to the ground and till the earth.
This year was bountiful
Next year let it also be so.

Moon, moon, bright moon
As bright as day;
In the darkness,
Your light gives us illumination.

*****INTERMISSION*****

PAN KUT

You will see in this dance portion of the program, that the drummers must also be dancers. The dance features the *sangmo* (a ribboned hat) and the *bubpo* (a feathered hat) which the performers will make move and spin with the energy of their dancing bodies. This particular *Pankut* is a modern rendition of the large group dances of the farming festivals made suitable for four men on a stage.

Because farmers were traditionally recruited as soldiers when a war broke out, there was a great exchange of ideas between the military musical tradition and the village dances. Most of the choreography is based on military exercises, and the hats the performers wear resemble ancient helmets. It has also been said that the *sangmo* originally had shards of glass and metal attached to the ribbon and were used as weapons during battle.

With feet treading the earth, ribbons flying upward, and rhythms sounding through the air, the players attempt to consummate the union of Heaven, Earth and Humankind. The banner, the spiritual member of the troupe, with its stake driven into the ground, and its feathers reaching for the sky, embodies the desire for cosmic harmony.

TRADITION MEETS THE PRESENT

From ancient days up until the outbreak of the Korean War, wandering entertainers called *Namsadang*, roamed across Korea visiting villages and cities. Upon announcing their arrival at the main gate of a village, they would make their way to the central courtyard and occupy it for

the next few days and nights, performing satirical mask dramas, puppet plays, acrobatic acts and shamanistic rites. After bidding the evil spirits to leave and good ghosts to come, the performers would invite all the villagers to gather, watch their acts and revel with them all night. These gatherings were an integral and important part of affirming life for the people of these isolated Korean villages for a countless number of centuries. The music that accompanied these gatherings can be described generally as *PoongmulNori*, “the playing of folk instruments.”

At the time of the Korean War, Koreans were becoming more familiar with the city and its Western oriented culture, losing touch with rural life and its rhythms. Namsadang and their music were quickly relegated to mythology and obsolescence. True to this new Western influence, an elevated proscenium stage equipped with microphones, lights and hi-tech equipment now stands where a stretch of grass used to be. SamulNori was formed in 1978 by descendants of these Namsadang, confronted by the changes in performance presentation, upheavals in Korean society and the quiet disappearance of their valuable musical heritage.

“We were shamans who played for the villagers’ needs and well being, and since the villagers have changed we too must change,” notes Kim Duk Soo, master drummer and one of the founding members of SamulNori.

The stage setting may now be 20th century, but the instruments remain the same: *K’kwaenggwari*, *Ching*, *Changgo* and *Buk*. The name SamulNori, literally meaning “To play four things,” refers to these four instruments, each associated with an element in nature. *K’kwaenggwari*, the small gong, represents lightning; the *Ching*, the large gong, represents wind, the *Changgo*, the hourglass drum, represents rain, and the *Buk*, the barrel drum, represents clouds.

When learning the music, it is necessary to understand the rudiments and the rich philosophy that cultivated the music. The theory of *yin* and *yang* (in Korean *um* and *yang*), prevalent throughout the music, is illustrated, among innumerable other examples, in the balance of the two metal instruments and the two leather ones. Most importantly, the four players must become one through *Ho-Hup*, the meditative technique that tames the mind, body, and spirit through breath control.

Although the music and presentation have been reinvented, their foundation remains unchanged and SamulNori intends to faithfully recreate for you the spirit of those massive village gatherings. In a few moments they will herald their arrival with the sounds of the drums and cry out:

Open the doors! Open the doors!
The Guardians of the Five Directions, Open your doors!
When all of humankind enters, they shall bring with them endless joy!

We invite all of you to enter and be a part of the festivities.

APPENDIX THREE

“REFLECTIONS ON SAMULNORI 1978-2008”³

It is surprisingly difficult to articulate the profound impact that SamulNori has had on the world of Korean music and culture in recent history. What once germinated as a musical collaboration and adventure between four gifted musicians in 1978 has since evolved into a veritable phenomenon. Indeed, the music created in those early years by Kim Duk Soo, the late Kim Yong Bae, Lee Kwang Soo, and Choi Jong sil was so remarkable and special that it inspired a nation to adopt it as its own. SamulNori eventually gave nascence to an entirely new genre of Korean music, samulnori, which has now come to be recognized as a quintessential part of Korean culture. Each individual SamulNori artist – Kim Duk Soo, Lee Kwang Soo, Choi Jong-sil and Nam Ki-moon (replacing the late Kim Yong Bae) is a true maestro in his own right. Through performance, pedagogy and outreach, each performer has continued to keep the spirit of samulnori alive for countless fans and admirers, in Korea and abroad.

Samulnori, literally, the “playing of four things” refers to the performance of four different percussion instruments: changgo (hourglass-shaped drum), puk (barrel-shaped drum), ching (large gong), and kkwaenggwari (small gong). The basic rhythms and content of the music derive from ancient traditions of p’ungmul (traditional farmers’ music) and musok (shamanic ritual music indigenous to Korea). While being strongly influenced by the characteristics and philosophies of older musical traditions, the music of SamulNori made a point of departure with its presentational format. The original quartet gave its inaugural performance on a Seoul stage at the Konggan Sarang “Space Theater” in February 1978; thereafter, the genre of samulnori has often been distinguished by the use of the proscenium stage and the dynamic recontextualization of rhythmic patterns into a composition. But much like the first performances of SamulNori that enraptured its listeners, it is perhaps the visceral energy created by the drummers and dancers of this tradition that steadfastly remains as SamulNori’s defining characteristic and source of appeal.

SamulNori’s success both in Korea and overseas has been extraordinary. A leading dance critic for the New York Times proclaimed that SamulNori was a group of “virtuoso percussionists” whose “drumming” modulated into sounds of any nuance – could lead to total astonishment.” Over the course of twenty-five years, SamulNori has garnered worldwide acclaim for their mesmerizing performances – performances that have the ability to transcend national and cultural boundaries and impart foreign audiences with an invaluable introduction to Korean music and culture. Internationally, SamulNori has previously toured in Australia, Austria, Brazil, China, Denmark, Germany, Greece, India, Japan, Russia, and extensively in the United States. On a domestic front, the immense popularity of SamulNori abroad helped to catalyze an awakened interest in Korean traditional performing arts.

³ This essay appeared in the 30th *Anniversary of SamulNori Program* in conjunction with the 30th anniversary reunion concerts performed by Kim Duk Soo, Lee Kwang Soo, Choi Jong-sil, and Nam Kimun (Lee, Katherine, “Reflections on SamulNori 1978-2008”).

A 30th anniversary is a significant milestone, and this moment gives pause for the community that makes up “SamulNori” to reflect on its own growth and development. For SamulNori, this entails the genesis of a new musical genre, renaissance of traditional Korean performing arts, foundation of educational facilities, development of pedagogical materials, and performances around the world at high profile international events. Although the first quartet eventually disbanded, each original member has followed a salient trajectory. Kim Duk Soo, an artistic visionary, has been at the helm of SamulNori Hanullim, and he has been recognized as one of the fifty most influential figures in Korea during the past five decades. Upon parting ways with SamulNori, Choi Jong-sil dedicated his life to pedagogy, and is currently serving as Professor of Music at ChungAng University in Seoul. Lee Kwang Soo chose to combine performance with pedagogy, and is now the director of the Academy of Korean Music in Yesan, Korea. Nam Ki-moon and Kang Min-seok similarly chose to pursue teaching and performance. Another less officially recognized member of the SamulNori community, Suzanna Samstag Oh (who was the original quartet’s first Managing Director) has gone on to serve in influential capacities in Korea. The performers and the staff who have contributed to SamulNori along the years have also grown as distinguished artists and as capable leaders in their respective professions.

But rather than simply enumerating accomplishments, a Korean word, nanjang, perhaps encapsulates best the philosophy underscoring the past thirty years. In traditional times, a nanjang was a communal meeting ground where villagers gathered to eat, drink, peddle wares, and watch various types of performances put on by groups of mostly itinerant musicians. A milieu charged by energy and movement (critiqued by some as chaotic) – was in essence a testament to life, an exuberant sharing of a common and temporal space. The members of SamulNori have always found the philosophy appealing and have thus applied it to various realms of their lives and work. Through their dynamic performances, SamulNori has somehow always managed to create a nanjang-like atmosphere for its audience – where mere strangers can meet and even dance together. The descendants of the wandering namsadang, confronted with modernity, have now become global itinerants, traversing oceans and continents with their festive show – bring life to unsuspecting locales with the music that is now known as “samulnori.”

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